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THE STORY OF AIMÉE

OR

A LIFE'S DISCIPLINE

**MURRAY AND GIBB, EDINBURGH,
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THE STORY OF AIMEE.

Frontispiece.

THE
STORY OF AIMÉE

OR

A LIFE'S DISCIPLINE

BY THE AUTHOR OF

'THE WISH AND THE WAY,' ETC.

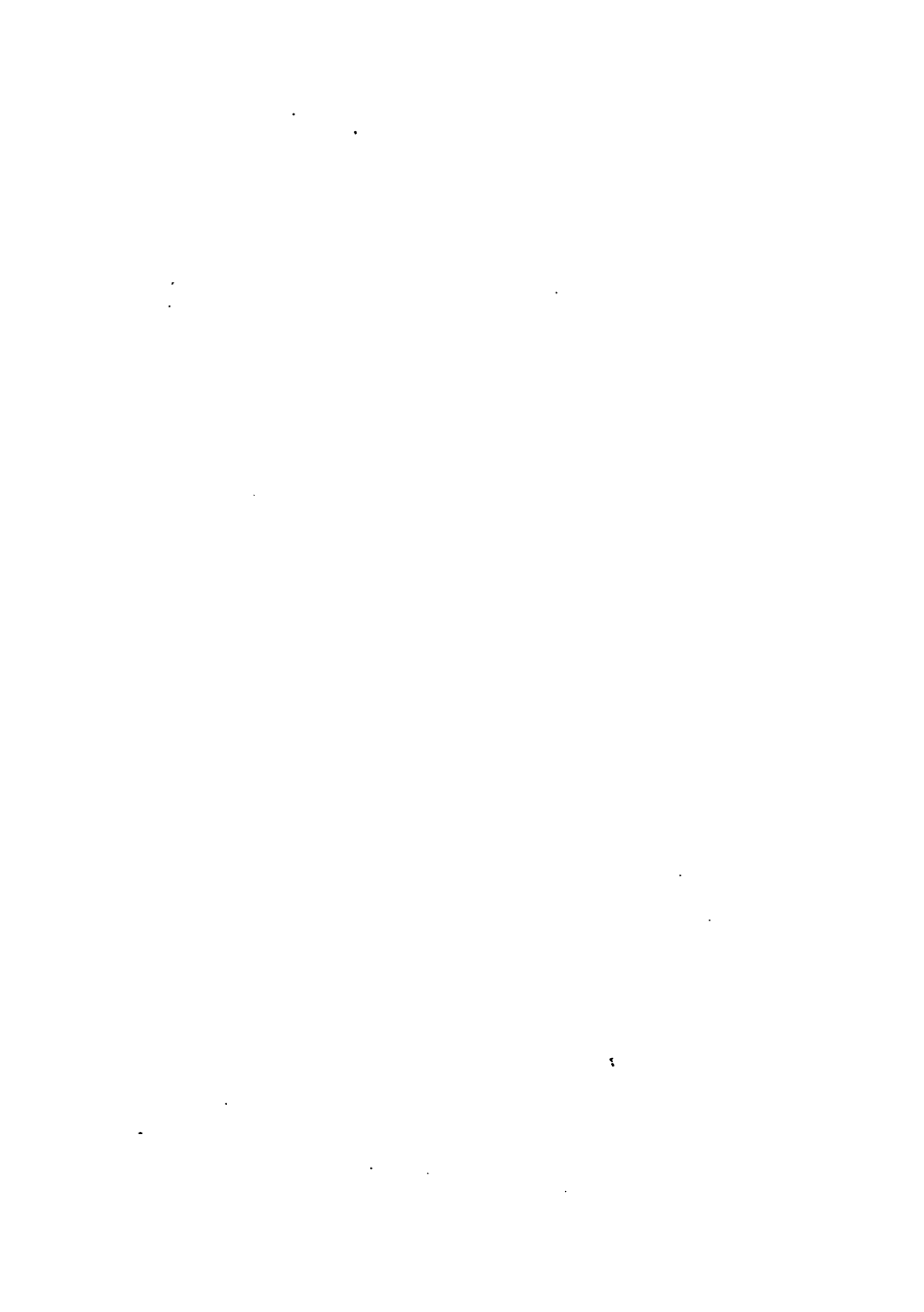


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AIMÉE; OR, A LIFE'S DISCIPLINE.

CHAPTER I.

THORNFIELD.

'She [he] was one that did love beauty only; and knowledge for its beauty; or if good, good only, for its beauty.'—TENNYSON.

'**W**HAT a fair spot this home of yours is, Frances!' said Captain Ellicombe to his sister, as, stretched on the smooth grass at Mrs. Waldegrave's feet, he revelled in the luxury of his present circumstances.

'It is very lovely,' was the lady's simple reply.

'Enchanting! and that not only for its own beauty, which is *unique*, but all its surroundings are so charming. Its elegance and comfort are so delightfully blended; and then its boats and gardens and horses! And, not to speak of your

own dear kind self, Franey, and Arthur, what an interest it possesses in that bright specimen of feminine exaction, Aimée herself! She reminds me of a crested wave on my dashing sea-home. How often I have seen her in my dreams, when rocked to sleep on the ocean wave! How often have I in dreamland visited this familiar Thornfield, and the dear old Rectory, walking noiselessly through the very rooms, and seeing you all! There is no place like one's berth for a good, comfortable, pleasant dream!

'Commend me to the good comfortable realities of *terra firma*,' said Mrs. Waldegrave, smiling, 'rather than to these miragic visions. But what a pleasure it is,' she added very kindly, 'to have you again among us, Edulf!'

He looked his thanks in the radiant flush which mantled over his sunburnt face, and in the tender love which beamed out upon her from his clear, honest eyes.

'Aimée,' he murmured in a musing sort of tone, 'what a life of ease and luxury hers has been!'

'And ever will be, I trust,' exclaimed Mrs.

Waldegrave, with a surprised look. 'I devoutly hope no storm will ever break over her dear path. She would never ——'

'She would, I trust,' interrupted Edulf, 'like the wave to which I have likened her, bend beneath it, only to rise nobly above it;' and as he thought of the beautiful girl's impetuous will and proud spirit, of her entire ignorance of self-denial, and of the excessive indulgence which had characterized the training of both parents, he added gravely: 'You, Frances, should be teaching your child how only she will be able successfully to encounter the storms and trials of life.'

'Oh!' said Mrs. Waldegrave, with a gesture of alarm; 'hush! Edulf, don't speak of storms here. You are fresh from your tempestuous ocean-life; but, for pity's sake, leave all the winds and storms there, and rest awhile amid quietness and peace.'

The spot where the brother and sister reclined was what Aimée called the border-land of the croquet-ground. The ground itself, smooth and soft as the skill of Brent could

make it, skirted the shore of the lake, on the side of which stood Thornfield House. The placid waters, in their fulness, palpitated under the drooping acacia and willow trees; while the gentle splash of the little boats, in their moorings, added its own delicious music to the notes of the myriad birds, whose nests lay snugly hid amid the fine laurels and thorns.

A dainty little thatched summer-house, above the terrace where Mrs. Waldegrave and Captain Ellicombe rested, offered a refuge from every shower, and served also as tea-room when the heat drove the players within its cool shelter for refreshment and shade. The house, nearly a mile from the water's edge, was reached by a gentle ascent, where, in its elevated beauty, it stood an object of universal admiration to the frequenters of this, one of the loveliest of the English lakes.

The croquet-party this afternoon was a lively one—rather too numerous, perhaps, for enthusiastic lovers of the game, but just the correct thing, the Captain declared, for the proper adjustment of the company; his own satis-

faction at the arrangement being not a little enhanced by the fact that it left him, on this early day after his arrival at Thornfield, very much alone with his sister. He was, besides, a novice in the game, and resisted all the entreaties of Aimée and her friends to play on this occasion ; promising, however, to watch attentively their evolutions and strokes, and so prepare himself for receiving lessons from some of the fair young votaries of the art.

Squire Waldegrave inherited the fine estate of Thornfield from his father, he having received it from a long and highly respected ancestry. Nearly twenty years before our story begins, he wooed and won the flower of the Rectory, and carried in triumph, from her many other suitors, the fair Frances Ellicombe to his beautiful home. Her marriage gave great satisfaction to her parents, who, pleased entirely with the position and amiable character of young Waldegrave, rejoiced still more in having their only daughter so pleasantly settled beside themselves. Their only other child, Edulf—now Captain Ellicombe—had been little at home for many years: the

ship which he joined was bound for foreign service, and he had only at rare intervals since his sister's marriage revisited his native land. During his last visit to England, Frances and her husband and Aimée were travelling on the Continent; and although a very happy meeting had taken place abroad, this was the first long visit she had yet received from her beloved sailor-brother. He was several years her junior, and had ever been the darling of her heart. In the interval between Edulf's last and present visit at home, his venerable father had very suddenly died; he was shortly afterwards followed by his gentle wife, and the old Rectory passed into other hands.

The changes in his early home, and the sad blank which the departure of both his parents—to whom he was ardently attached—caused in Edulf's heart, made his present home-coming at first a very painful one. Frances, however, was so loving and tender, and her husband and Aimée joined so warmly in their kind endeavours to soothe and interest Uncle Edulf, that his manly heart was profoundly touched; and while, as

a reward to their exertions, his cheerful temperament regained its tone, the closest tie was cemented between him and his sister's family. At first all his talk was about his parents; and his solitary rambles in and about the Rectory, every walk and tree of which called up some hallowed association of the past, seemed only to foster and feed his grief. His sorrow, however, was the reverse of morbid or selfish. He shrank, with all the sensitiveness of a generous nature, from infecting others with his sadness. But with his sister there needed no reserve. Like himself, she had been the object of these dear parents' tenderest love and care, and the blank in her heart was not less painful than in his own. So inexpressibly sweet was her sympathy to his bereaved heart, and so gentle her words of comfort, that he was ever ready to disengage himself from all other company to talk to her and listen to her. Yet, when her recital of the closing moments of these honoured lives stirred his soul, and made him, in his orphan solitude, crave for but one last look from eyes which were sealed in death,

what could *she* do for him more than mingle her tears with his? Ah, there were depths in his being which no human heart or hand could reach. How these depths were met, we shall see as our story advances.

After an interesting talk, Edulf relapsed into a reverie, while Frances sat quietly gazing with strong sisterly pride on the noble-looking man who rested at her feet.

Suddenly their musings were cut short by the arrival of two gentlemen who had walked over from the Rectory, and who, after a little conversation with Mrs. Waldegrave and Edulf, joined the croquet-party.

‘I often marvel,’ said the lady, ‘how we ever contrived to entertain our visitors in the summer, before that game was introduced. In fine weather, one has no trouble now with one’s guests. They all rush to croquet. Mrs. Beresford says she looks upon it as quite a providential arrangement to keep persons—studious, hard-working ones especially—in the open air, and so prolong and preserve health.’

‘A comfortably sublime and ingenious light,’

answered Edulf, 'in which to view the amount of time spent by the Rector over the game.'

The Rev. Gerard Beresford, who succeeded Mr. Ellicombe in the living, was an agreeable, if not very popular, successor to the late venerable rector; and the pleasantest intercourse subsisted between his family and the Squire's.

'Aimée has many friends coming about her,' said Edulf, rousing himself from memories of the past to notice the gay party on the croquet-ground. 'Aimée, Aimée,' he softly murmured, as he plucked some roses from an adjacent bush. 'What was the origin? Why was she so named? I forget.'

'Oh,' said Mrs. Waldegrave, 'Arthur and I had a friendly battle on the subject. I averred that his mother should have our darling's name, and he as strenuously declared it should be our mother's; and as we could not agree, we resolved on a fancy name, and I chose Aimée. It was rather a clever idea,' continued the fond mother, smiling; 'for if she realized the meaning of her name, it involved of course her having beauty and grace, and every attraction of person

and mind; and really, unless she had been beautiful, I should certainly have died of a broken heart. But my most sanguine wishes are met. She is admired everywhere and by everybody.'

'Poor child!' Edulf almost unconsciously muttered.

'What?'

'Very trying for her to ——'

'Oh! but she is so good, so very good, when ——'

'When she has everything her own way. So I observe.'

'She is ——'

'Wonderfully little spoiled,' said Edulf bluntly.

'Little! Do you think her at all spoiled?' asked Mrs. Waldegrave, with an injured look.

'As I said, amazingly little,' persisted Edulf. 'But, as yet, I have here had no opportunity of testing her amiability, for she has not once been thwarted. It's no proof of a good ship that she sails well in smooth water, you know, Franey; any old tub would do the same. But hold hard, till we see how she weathers the storm. Miss

Aimée has a good stout will of her own still.'

'Most persons have,' said Mrs. Waldegrave, with a conscious smile. 'Surely *you* will admit that there is very little character where there is not strong will.'

'True. But you only have a really fine character where the will is under proper control to principle. I have never forgotten the day at Milan, when my sturdy little niece carried her point so triumphantly.'

'What was that? I have quite forgotten.'

'She was very desirous to ascend the Cathedral; but, after her severe illness, you—we all indeed—dreaded the exertion for her. However, she simply declared her determination to go; and go she did. At the middle of the steps, you remember, she broke down; but such was her determination to attain her object, that she called upon Arthur to carry her up, which he actually did to the very top! It makes my back ache to this day when I think of it. And being arrived at the summit of her wishes, instead of every one looking somewhat coldly on

the young lady, there was lost, in the charm of her enthusiasm and enjoyment, the wholesome reproof which at least she deserved. Arthur, you remember, suffered smartly for his exertion.'

'Oh yes, I do remember something about it,' said Mrs. Waldegrave, through whose memory a whole host of similar illustrations rushed. 'But why fix on such episodes as reminiscences of Aimée? Have you forgotten all her merry playfulness and fun and——'

'I have forgotten none of it,' interrupted Edulf warmly. 'I have carried the dear child's image in my heart; and many a time the mere thought of her dash and beauty has refreshed my spirit. But one does not shut one's eyes to the faults of those one loves.'

'It is very disagreeable, however, to be reminded of them,—in Aimée especially.'

'I do so long to see her a noble, self-forgetting girl,—loving, as well as loved,—loving, too, that which is highest and best.'

Mrs. Waldegrave's eye fell beneath her brother's eager glance, but she merely said, in a rallying tone, 'Now, Edulf, you are not to begin stroking

me the wrong way, for it's what I never could endure, and never will. And don't, please, talk any more of storms and waves, and old tubs rolling over, and that kind of thing. I hope and pray that no storms may ever cross Aimée's dear path.'

'But, Franey, strive to brace her to what is duty; and don't, by your indulgence, enervate her powers of self-denial and control.'

'Time enough yet—time enough, surely, when the sky begins to lower.'

'But Aimée is not always going to live in this downiest of nests.'

'Well, when she does leave it, I hope it may be for one downier still, and softer too. No one wishes to lessen their comfort by marriage, I presume. But, thinking it well to change the subject, 'do look how eager they are getting over their game.'

'Who is that nice-looking fellow who is talking to Aimée? There are so many faces strange to me now in this familiar old neighbourhood.'

'Vincent Durant, Sir Wilfred's son.'

'Eldest?'

'Yes: future baronet and heir of Wickley Manor.'

'Ah!' as he watched the young man hovering round Aimée, 'one could not call him handsome; but I like that open expression of his face immensely.'

'And that firm, self-contained looking man, who seems as if he meant to drive his ball right into the centre of the lake, instead of through that fragile hoop?'

'Drummond is his name. He is Scotch, and is on a visit at the Rectory to his sister, Mrs. Beresford.'

'He looks like a man of strong character and intelligence. Is he of the Drummonds of——'

'Of some quite unpronounceable Highland *athie* or *ochie*, I presume,' interrupted Mrs. Waldegrave. 'His town house is in Edinburgh, where he is a rising barrister—advocate, I believe I should say. He is a man of fascinating manners, and paints very beautifully. His knowledge on all subjects is really surprising. He seems to know and understand about *everything*, and communicates his information in so agreeable and

unconscious a sort of way, that one feels wonderfully easy under the rather humbling sensation of one's own ignorance.'

'Good! I shall not be so terribly afraid of him as the first part of your eulogy was beginning to make me.'

'He is a widower, and has several children.'

'Indeed!'

'He has been captivating all the ladies about, and has actually been trying to make himself pleasant to Aimée.'

'Aimée! Oh! I trust she never will become a stepmother. One little boy or girl I should not mind: but a whole family! Franey, you would never encourage such a thing?'

'Dear girl, I don't believe she has a thought beyond her present home,' said Mrs. Waldegrave, as a tear glistened in her violet eyes. 'She is very young, you know.'

'And is fluttering, butterfly-like, in the sunshine of adulation at present. But depend upon it, Franey, she has thoughts of a nest for herself.'

'Well, as that pretty little song says which

Mrs. Beresford sings so sweetly, she had better, I think, "bide a wee." Now, Edulf, watch the game.'

'There is something rather repell—, — well, not very pleasing—in that tall Miss Witherington who is staying here.'

'Miss Witherington! Why, she is the great catch of the season here. She is excessively rich ——'

'And looks quite as if she knew it, and wished every one else to know it too. She is decidedly plain.'

'Oh dear, no! Her nose is perhaps a little red, and her figure stout—stoutish at least; but she has beautiful teeth.'

'She is the reverse of intellectual-looking.'

'She *is* rather stupid—or perhaps odd, I should say. She and her mother reside at Airey Lodge, where you remember the Dickinsons lived. Mrs. Witherington bought the place, and we have frequent exchange of visits. Gertrude is peculiar in her way.'

'Evidently,' answered Edulf, as he watched her with her eye-glass diving down upon her ball,

and then, to the dismay of her side, switching it away far from the modest hoop through which it was important it should pass.

‘She has an irresolute air about her, rather betokening a doingless, pithless character.’

‘Exactly ; and yet she is so full of consequence. But then she is an heiress, Edulf—a really great heiress, and a good girl too.’

‘She is far too richly dressed for a croquet-party,’ said Edulf, who seemed this afternoon in a rather critical mood. ‘What a contrast to Aimée in her white dress and sailor’s hat !’

Mrs. Waldegrave smiled at her brother’s minute observation, and said, ‘She must spend her money, you know, and put some of it on her own person.’

‘I have often thought,’ said Edulf, laughing, ‘what a capital plan it would be if the surplus income of too rich people could be placed in a fund, to be appropriated to the use of others less burdened with the needful, especially of young lovers who cannot fulfil their vows for want of a little more of this indispensable coin. What a pure emotion would be theirs, to know themselves

the joyful instruments of so much happiness to others! Why does no philanthropic mortal start a scheme like that?’

‘Moot it to Miss Witherington,’ said Mrs. Waldegrave, who, if the truth must be told, had laid the plan of a little match-making between her brother and the rich young heiress.

‘Oh no, no! thank you. She doesn’t look as if she would come down with a good round sum; and a scheme like that must be well started. No, no; that nose of hers is too aspiring for that sort of thing.’

‘Oh! you don’t know. But, at any rate,’ with a conclusive bend of the head, ‘she’s an heiress, and really a good girl.’

‘Oh! look at Miss Carew. What a stroke she has made!’ continued Mrs. Waldegrave, who, on any little dilemmas arising in the talk, took refuge in remarks upon the game.

‘Is that the young lady in the blue dress? I have been watching her careful play.’

‘Yes; Meredith, or, as she is universally called, Merry Carew. She is ‘Sir Peter Carew’s grandchild, and a darling girl she is. Her home has

always been with the old people at Oakwood. How she contrives to be always so sunny and bright, is quite extraordinary ; for you know how strict and serious Sir Peter and Lady Anne have always been. The strange thing, too, is that they are dotingly fond of her, and yet they are perpetually thwarting and crossing her innocent will.'

'I must improve my acquaintance with her,' said Edulf. 'She seems real and fresh. I should think hers will be the winning side, she has such a look of heartiness in all she does. Her *face* laughs when *she* laughs, and these round ringing tones are perfectly delicious in their naturalness.'

But now the croquet-party, whose excitement had evidently been rising, seemed to have reached a climax of excitement, and the whole party gathered round Mr. Drummond, who, whatever his real feelings might be, looked the coolest of all. A moment of breathless silence, and then a shout of triumph rent the air as it was announced that Mr. Drummond had, by a very difficult and dexterous stroke, brought his own ball, and that of his only outstanding comrade,

safe to the goal. The victors were exuberant in their expressions of delight, and of admiration at Mr. Drummond's first-rate play; while the vanquished gave vent to a great deal of grumbling and explanatory talk, to which none but themselves paid the slightest heed.

Presently the Squire ran up the terrace towards his wife and Edulf—the keenest of the keen, and perfectly radiant with victory.

‘Well, Edulf, what do you think of croquet? You could not possibly have had a finer specimen of a well-contested game. Mr. Drummond and Vincent were neck to neck, with a side backing each of almost equal excellence. That stroke of mine near the last wasn't a bad one—eh, Mr. Drummond?’ again rubbing his hands and chuckling with delight.

‘It was the stroke of the day,’ answered Mr. Drummond. ‘Not a doubt about it.’

‘What do you think of the game, Uncle Edulf?’ asked Aimée.

‘Never having seen it played before,’ answered Edulf, springing to his feet and assisting his niece to a seat on the grass, ‘must I weigh my

impressions meditatively and consecutively before I speak?’

‘Oh no, no; just give us your first impressions off-hand, please.’

‘I think, then, that it is a sublime device for showing off ankles and arms,—helpful too, extremely helpful, in advancing pleasant acquaintanceships, especially among persons of such a shy disposition as myself. So strong—from my observations this afternoon—is my conviction on this point, that I have resolved to commence my curriculum to-morrow, if you, Aimée, and Miss Carew, will undertake the task of indoctrinating such an *ignoramus* in the art. I fancy I could manage easily the long strokes; but that mysterious wriggling and higgling round the hoops has quite mystified me. You drive a long, steady stroke, sir,’ addressing Mr. Drummond.

‘I am so accustomed to play golf up in Scotland, that I sometimes forget, and drive too strong a ball; but one’s hand soon gets into the way, and *putting* helps me greatly at croquet.’

'Well,' said the Squire, 'you must have your revenge to-morrow, Vincent. Young ladies, eh? may we hope for your presence to-morrow afternoon?'

The challenge was readily accepted by all, while Merry Carew fell into a condition bordering on ecstasy at the prospect of a second match so soon, and with the idea of having the delightful-looking captain for her pupil. 'I shall be late, I fear,' she said, as she tripped away with Aimée towards the house; 'but good Frisk will bear me swiftly home; and gran'ma is so kind, she will not say one scolding word.'

'Next to the weariness of looking on at games, is the bore of talking them over,' said Miss Witherington to Edulf as they reached the Hall steps. 'Don't you agree with me, Captain Ellicombe?'

The young lady had made many efforts during the walk to engage Edulf in a dull flirtation while discussing the game. His mind, however, was in no mood for such frivolous talk, nor did he find himself otherwise attracted to his com-

panion. So, suddenly remembering an engagement to meet the Squire at the stables, he gracefully apologized to Miss Witherington for closing their *tête-à-tête*, and abruptly hurried away.





CHAPTER II.

EDULF.

' Be still, my soul, be still ;
Unquiet is the world without,
All strife, and fickleness, and doubt ;
Seek thou the stedfast will.

' One home, one haven, alone
There is ; one sacred resting-place :
The everlasting truth and grace
Of the unchanging One.

' Give rest, my God, within,
Mid strifes and dark uncertainties,
The tumults and the vanities,
The passion and the sin.

' Speak Thou, and winds shall cease ;
The life-long storm is o'er—
I rest upon the shore
Where breathes the balm of peace.'

DR. BONAR.

LEAVING for a little the party at Thornfield, we ask you, reader, to retrace with us your steps, and visit one or two scenes full of interest in the past history

of Edulf Ellicombe. Having spent the greater part of his last leave of absence at the Rectory, gladdening with his bright spirit and loving ways the hearts of parents and friends, he tore himself at length away from what proved to be his last visit to his early home, and his last sight of the beloved parents there. Having reserved a portion of his leave to spend with his sister abroad, he, as already mentioned in the previous chapter, joined her and her family in Italy, whence they passed into Switzerland, visiting some of the finest scenery in both countries. While residing with them at Interlâchen, he accidentally learnt that the family of a late brother officer of his was then at Lucerne ; and, leaving the little party in the pleasant company of friends, he made a run over to Lucerne. From Mr. and Mrs. Raynall, and their daughter Constance, Edulf received the most cordial welcome. A sailor ! and a friend of their lost Clyne, they seemed to vie with each other in the expression of their kind interest for him ; and very soon he passed to an advanced stage of acquaintanceship with them

all. He drove with them, and rode and sang with Constance ; while all the places of interest in and about the *unique* lake of the four cantons were visited, from the sublime Cathedral, with its famous organ, and the picturesque Herryottswald, and Rothsee, to the Righi itself—their visit to which was one to be remembered above most other visits, at least in the estimation of Edulf and Constance.

No one could be in the company of Constance Raynall without feeling that indescribable but most real influence which the mere presence of female loveliness and refinement sheds around. Yet it was not alone the charms of her personal beauty, although these were of no ordinary kind, which captivated Edulf ; it was the untiring unselfishness of her character, as manifested in her devotion to her delicate mother, and her sweet deportment towards her imperious and most exacting father. She never appeared to summon self into the family discussions and plans, but was ever on the outlook for what would be best and pleasantest for others. That she should be so endowed personally—so intellectual and ac-

complished besides—so surrounded with luxury, and yet so exceedingly simple in her tastes, was a continual source of interest and surprise to Edulf. Nor only on her parents was her unselfish care bestowed—she seemed to have a heart ‘at leisure from itself’ to care for, and interest itself in all with whom she was brought into contact; while such was the charm of her manners, that even when conferring a favour or kindness, it rather seemed as if she were receiving it herself.

Edulf found himself becoming more and more irresistibly fascinated by her, yet somehow, too, he felt that a wide barrier seemed between them—a something in her sweet earnest life which he lacked in his own aimless existence. He discovered at last the key-note to her life. It was struck in the following way. He, along with a party of friends, dined one evening with the Raynalls at their hotel. It fell to his lot to hand Constance to dinner—an event which gave him no small satisfaction; for, frequent as their meetings were, they had but little opportunity for any private talk. To-night, however, circum-

stances favoured him. Those around them were busy discussing the merits of the 'vox humana' stop of the Cathedral organ, the chances of fine weather for a projected ascent of Pilatus, and other topics so absorbing in their interest, that the young couple were free to chat away as they pleased. As, later in the evening, they strolled into the pretty pleasure-grounds, their conversation turned to Clyne, whose fate had been so very sad. Brave and adventurous, he had, when in his ship off the barbarous shore of Patagonia, gone ashore with some of the crew to beat about for game. He wandered from the rest; and when night approached, and the sailors began to think of rejoining their ship, the young lieutenant was amissing. Vainly they shouted and searched, and finally had to pull off from shore. Just as the boat had neared the ship, wild yells rent the air, and presently young Raynall, pursued by a small band of barbarians, flew to the spot where the boat had been moored. Horror-stricken, he found himself too late, but determined to defend himself to the last moment: he suddenly wheeled round upon the savages, and,

presenting his rifle, made signs that he would shoot the first who laid a finger on him. As a practical illustration of his meaning, he aimed and fired at a hawk hovering over the adjacent crags, which fell instantly dead. By this time the ship's crew, who, as far as the increasing darkness would permit, were silent and appalled spectators of the scene, seeing his desperate condition, prepared to pull off again to shore. The savages, terrified at the sight and sound of firearms—ignorant, besides, of what the resources of this murderous instrument might be—turned to fly. Quick as thought, Clyne plunged into the sea, and, being an expert swimmer, hope again filled his young heart. He had, however, to part with his faithful rifle; and the savages, who still watched his movements, seeing this, again yelled over their prey, and, being themselves swift swimmers, gave chase after the brave young sailor. Exhausted he sank, and was seen no more by the boat's crew, who strained every muscle as they rowed back to shore from the distant ship. They had watched with eager anxiety the movements of their brave young

officer, but were too far removed to render any assistance ; night suddenly fell ere they reached the shore, and the scared savages were nowhere to be seen. All further search in the dark was vain ; yet through the long sad night they rowed round the spot, and day-break found them still hovering near. No trace, however, of the body of their comrade could be discovered, and, very reluctantly and sorrowfully, they were compelled to quit the spot, enshrined henceforth in their memories as the grave of their young lieutenant.

Over and over again had Edulf talked every detail of the tragedy with Constance and her mother ; and the hope which would linger in his heart, that Clyne might still survive, was seized on by both with characteristic gratitude.

‘If,’ said Edulf this evening to Constance,—‘if that horrible darkness had not come down upon us, we should have saved him, certainly. But everything seemed against him, brave fellow!’

‘Well,’ said Constance, fixing her dark, speaking eyes upon her companion, ‘after all, it is for ourselves only we need mourn ; for Clyne was



a child of God, and nothing *evil could* befall him.'

'I never knew a finer fellow,' answered Edulf heartily. 'He deserved a better fate than to be cut off so cruelly in his bright young days ; and that's my sole reason for thinking he still may live, for I must own that no glimmer of hope which my judgment can perceive is to be found in the dark circumstances which surround his fate. It is, besides, less painful to think of him finding a grave in the ocean depth, than that he should fall a prey to the frightful savages which people these dismal regions. Had it been a knotless thread like me, the world could have jogged on well enough without me. But Clyne !'

'And what of *you* ?' said Constance, in a voice so thrilling in its sweet earnestness that he started at its tones. 'Would it have been well with *you* had you been called away ? Have you a hope beyond the grave ?—a hope in God ?'

She gazed at him with those lovely eyes, through which her soul ever seemed to look out : he could perceive a tear glisten on the long lashes, he heard the quiver in her voice, and saw

the flush which mantled on her cheek, telling of the effort which it cost her thus to speak ; but before he could stammer forth a word, she added, 'Nay, it is not to me that you need tell the experience of your heart. It is with God you have to do,—with Him, too, who sent His Son to save sinners, even such as we.'

'Such as we!' How the words sank into his heart! He gazed at her in her queen-like yet girlish beauty, so pure, so transparent-looking, so simple, so sincere ; and had they been alone, he felt as if his spontaneous act would have been to open his heart to her, to fall at her feet and tell her how far removed from her he in his sin and selfishness felt himself to be. But there were others around them, and breathlessly he longed for her to speak again ; some one else, however, now claimed her attention, and he could not again secure from her another word of quiet talk.

The glorious summer day was closing in a night of serene loveliness. The heat, which through the day had been great, was less oppressive now, and the busy hum in the streets was being slowly hushed. Tourists poured out

from the various hotels, to take, possibly, their first quiet look of Lucerne, or to revisit scenes photographed in their familiar loveliness on their hearts. Forth from a private hotel there issued a solitary figure, whose step, as he gained the street, seemed irresolute, in its evident uncertainty, which direction to take. A glance, but only one, was cast on the *coup d'œil* which met his gaze, comprehending as it did the picturesque old covered bridges, the water-towers, and, far away, the sublime mountains, whose shadows lay slanting on the bosom of the lake. The next moment his decision seemed made, and, darting hastily through the badly paved streets, he took his way straight onwards to the lake. From the pier he stepped into one of the gay little boats already drawn up, and, seizing the oars, struck a few vigorous strokes, and away he was gliding over the clear, green-blue waters. Had Edulf—for it was he—been less absorbed with the current of his own thoughts, no eye would have been more observant than his of the remarkable charms of the scene around him. But he heeded not the fine

Cathedral spires as they shot up into the perfectly pure atmosphere, nor the pretty little villages, with their straggling houses and tiny flower-beds. With renewed vigour in his stroke he pulled away from shore, and sights and sounds of every kind, until at last, finding himself far from all, he drew in his oars, and, leaving the boat to ripple and drift as it pleased, he threw himself down, and, pillowing his throbbing head upon the seat, he gazed up into the heavens.

‘She asked me if I had hope in God,’ he exclaimed in a sharp tone of distress; ‘and I have not. I have had hope in the world, in my profession, in myself, but not in God. And oh, how shadowy do all these hopes now seem!’

A current of feeling, partly new and partly revived, swept through his being. He felt as if he had been dreaming all his life till now, and as if passing from mists and shadows into a strange, but most real world. The great idea of God now filled his soul,—of Him whose grand and beautiful works, scattered in their profusion, lay around him and on every side.

The thought, too, that it was with Him *he* had to do, and that against Him he had been sinning all his life, filled him with dismay. Passages from the Bible taught him by his tutors were recalled. Prayers breathed from his mother's lips beside his little bed long years ago, came back to mind ; and, stretching out his hands towards the star-lit heavens, he almost unconsciously exclaimed, giving utterance to the language of his heart, in a tone of anguish, ' My mother, my own sainted mother, are you now looking down upon me from your home in these calm skies? Oh that, when I had you, I had listened to your holy, loving words ! But now it is too late. Would that I had you back, if but for one short hour, to clasp me to your breast, and teach me how to follow you to heaven !'

Suddenly he raised himself and gazed around. His eye, passing from all other scenes, fell instantly on Mount Pilatus, whose cloudy summit, capped ever with darkness and storm, looked more than ever gloomy and grim. The wild tradition concerning this mountain suddenly photographed itself as with a lightning flash

on Edulf's troubled mind. According to the tradition, this mountain owes its name to the facile and time-serving governor of Judea, who, conscience-stricken for his crowning act of wickedness, threw himself into a lake near its summit. His unabsolved spirit still haunts the sunken body, which, taking dire revenge for being disturbed, sends forth lightnings and storms on all the region round. This legend, which Edulf had often heard, and which he had scornfully looked upon as nothing but a grotesque and barbarous fable, now assumed a quite different aspect, fitting in as it did with the disturbed current of his thoughts, and imparting to them a character of unearthly dread of which he had scarcely ever been conscious before. He fell upon his knees, and as again he pillowed his aching head upon the little seat, the words 'God be merciful to me a sinner' breathed forth from his trembling lips.

Once again he raised his eyes. But how the scene had changed! His little boat had drifted, and the dread mountain now only frowned behind him. The last golden streaks of the

dying day gleamed upon the crystal bosom of the lake, while from the shore the air came laden with the perfume of the heavy-scented daturas, and fragrant with the aromatic scent of pine and mountain flowers. He drew his boat to shore, and, as he listened breathlessly to catch the sound of a little merry brook, suddenly, like angels' music, there was wafted on the air the sound of the vesper hymn from the neighbouring little chapel, clear and soft through the stillness.

The hymn his mother had often sung, and the sweetly familiar strains, touched a chord in his aching heart. Was she speaking to him thus? Was his prayer being answered so? Yes; this unconscious influence stealing towards him on the soft still air, was, like the cock-crowing of old, causing the word, long since dropped into his heart, to be lovingly '*remembered*' and blest.

Next morning rose fresh and beautiful over the fair little town of Lucerne. How little do we often know, as we push open our window and gaze into the clear rosy dawn, what mists and clouds may fall over our path ere that glorious sun shall have sunk and set at the evening-tide!

Constance Raynall, as usual, was early astir, and the progress which a sketch before her had made, bore witness to her indefatigable, patient industry. She had just risen, and with eager, yet most critical, eyes was gazing upon her morning's work, when the sound of approaching footsteps made her heart beat quick. Who could it be coming to see her in her little out-of-the-way *sanctum?* and what could bring the intruder?

Had there been an artist present to catch the outline of that face and form when bent thus absorbed over her little water-colour, surely no finer subject could have been desired to form a most charming picture. She wore a clear pink muslin dress, with the smallest, snowiest collar and sleeves, and her exquisitely moulded bust showed to advantage through the thin, soft folds of her dress. Her dark brown hair, arranged in thick, glossy plaits, was coiled round her beautiful head, and, brushed entirely from her forehead, revealed a face almost dazzling in its beauty. Her features were small, but classically chiselled, and her complexion pure

and fair as a lily, while a flush on her cheek, not of excitement, but of health, contrasted finely with the extreme purity of her skin. And over her face and form, so full of girlish life and enthusiasm, there rested, nevertheless, a look of such repose as told of an inward rest and peace.

Ere she had time to form a second conjecture upon the approaching footsteps, suddenly her father bustled into the room. Mr. Raynall was tall, and very handsome, more elderly than one would have expected Constance's father to be—with a hard, keen expression in his light blue eyes, and a puckered look about the corners of the mouth, which told of a peevish and imperious spirit.

'Good morning,' he said sharply.

'Good morning,' she replied, hastily laying down her palette and springing forward to meet him.

'Have you had any letters, or notes, or anything this morning?'

She coloured deeply, for she had had two.

'Two?'

'Yes, papa.'

‘Two? Was one of them from Marjoribanks?’

‘It was; I am so vexed about it—so displeased.’

‘Displeased!’ said her father, with elevated eyebrows.

‘Very, papa; so will you be when you know about what he has written to me.’

‘Angry—vexed. What does he say?’

She answered by placing the letter in his hand.

Somewhat mollified by the frankness of the action, Mr. Raynall adjusted his spectacles and read.

The letter contained an offer to Constance of Mr. Marjoribanks himself and his great possessions. Of the former he said, with very comfortable self-complacency, she could judge for herself, his own mental calculations on the subject leading him, of course, to expect that her judgment would be as satisfactory as his own; of the latter, as she might not be cognizant of their very imposing value and extent, he entered into a most elaborate and wordy description.

Mr. Raynall's interest grew visibly, as he read page after page of this high-flown panegyric on himself and his belongings by his good friend Marjoribanks.

'Pon my word, Conny,' he blurted out at last, 'you will be a grand lady. I wasn't aware Marjoribanks had Welsh property too. Eh?'

'Has he? I didn't know,' she answered abstractedly.

'Bless me! haven't you read his letter?'

'I really couldn't, papa,' she replied, while an amused smile played over her face.

'Couldn't!' he replied, with a displeased look; then, softening a little, he added, 'Well, these Welsh names are rather jaw-locking, certainly. But you read the rest?'

'I saw what he meant at the beginning; and as it was too ridiculous ever to think of, I didn't care how many dreadful Welsh castles and places he had. I stopped just there.'

'Constance,' said her father, taking off his spectacles and gazing almost wildly upon her, 'you surprise and irritate me extremely. I hope there's to be no romance and silliness in a case

like this, for I will not permit it. Do you hear?’

‘I have answered his letter,’ she said simply.

‘Answered his letter!’ starting up. ‘And what did you say, pray?’

‘I just thanked Mr. Marjoribanks for his great kindness to me; but as a woman may not marry her grandfather, I hoped, of course, he would excuse me.’

‘Constance!’ exclaimed her father in a perfect ecstasy of indignation. ‘And is your note gone?’ He waited breathlessly for her reply.

‘I wasn’t so rude as to say these very words, papa; but that was the substance, you know.’

‘Is your note gone?’ roared Mr. Raynall.

‘No; I was just going to show it to mamma before sending it. But she will quite approve.’

‘Give it me this moment!’ exclaimed her father, snatching from his daughter’s hand the envelope which she immediately produced. ‘Now sit down and write another and entirely different reply.’

‘Will this not do, papa? It is quite polite, and the plainer it is the better. Had this been

April day, I should have treated the whole affair entirely as a joke.'

Joke indeed! There was evidently nothing further from Mr. Raynall's mind. 'Now write as I dictate.'

Constance obeyed; but after a few words, in which to her amazement she discovered what her father's wish and intentions were, she laid down her pen, and, looking gravely into his face, said very sweetly, but firmly, 'I cannot write that, papa.'

'You refuse to obey me, Constance! You refuse to gratify me by making my good friend happy!'

'Would you wish *him* to be gratified at the expense of *my* happiness?'

'Tush! you would be as happy as a bird the livelong day. With your carriages and castles, and wealth, how could you fail to be happy? And it is my conviction of this that makes me so earnest in the matter.'

'Papa—I cannot.'

'Constance—you shall. You have never in all your life disobeyed me once, and you will

make no exception now. What can possibly be your objection to my good'— he had nearly added 'old,' but he checked himself in time— 'friend Marjoribanks?'

Ah, there it was! He was as old as her father at least, and dreadfully commonplace and plain.

'Speak—answer me.'

'He is far too—old, papa ; and very disagreeable besides.'

'And,' with a sneer, 'too rich for your romantic notions, and too disinterested besides. Some penniless youth will suit you better, perhaps. Possibly, however, it may not quite suit *my* views on the subject.'

'You would never, papa,' said Constance, blushing, and much distressed,—'you would never *ask* me to write or act differently in such a case than I have done?'

'We shall see,' he answered in great wrath; and, gathering up the pages of the long, obnoxious letter, he marched majestically out of the room.

He strode along to the *salon* in a very per-

turbed and irritable condition of mind. A secret consciousness told him that his gentle wife would be on her child's side, and he should thus have two women's wills to break down under his own iron fiat. With no hesitation as to the course to be pursued, but with a strong feeling of repugnance to the task before him, who should he at this inauspicious juncture stumble against but Edulf Ellicombe!

'Good morning, Mr. Raynall,' said Edulf. 'I hope I am not too late for breakfast. What a fine prospect the weather holds out for Mount Pilatus to-day!'

'Ah;' and with a mental 'two and two make four,' Mr. Raynall assured himself that he saw in the young man before him a clue to his daughter's obstinacy and infatuation.

With an ominous flash in his eye, and the cold extension of two fingers to greet his guest, Mr. Raynall muttered 'Good morning, sir.'

A dull shiver shot through Edulf's heart; but, serenely unconscious of having given the least cause for such sudden change of manner, he instantly drew himself up, and in a somewhat

freezing tone expressed the hope that the ladies were well.

‘My wife, as usual, is poorly ; and my daughter, sir—what should it signify to you particularly how *she* is? It’s not very pleasant to have to speak so plainly ; *but* I don’t care for you coming eternally about her, and—a—n—d paying her so much attention, forsooth!’

‘I, sir! I feel as if I could never be sufficiently attentive to any member of your honoured family, in expression of my gratitude for all *your* kind attention to *me*. As for Miss Raynall, I admire her profoundly, and owe more to her than any words can express.’ He spoke out of the fulness of his heart, and in recollection of his experience the former evening.

To these few but earnest words Mr. Raynall could of course attach no meaning but such as ministered to the angry suspicions which were now agitating his heart. With blunt hastiness he exclaimed, ‘Oh, that is all very fine—*very* fine indeed ; but such sentiment is all thrown away upon *me*! I want none of that humbug, let me tell you, sir ; and I cannot, and will not,

have you coming any more about her. So let that be plainly understood.'

'May I see Miss Raynall?' asked Edulf, with much emotion, which he vainly endeavoured to conceal.

'Eh! Certainly not; *most* certainly not. How can you ask anything so absurd, after all I have just been saying? One would think I had been talking to the wind.'

'Mr. Raynall, I am going; and soon I shall be on the ocean again, with only the memory of these bright days to bless my heart. May I not bid her farewell; and dear Mrs. Raynall, too——'

'Better not; I'll tell them you were sorry not to see them. That's quite enough—quite. And remember,' as if catching suddenly a new idea,— 'remember, I forbid any correspondence. No sending of letters either, under cover to other people, and that sort of thing.'

Edulf drew himself proudly up, and, in a tone which he tried to steady, said: 'Whatever opinion you may have of *my* sense of honour, sir, you know you can trust Miss Raynall;'

and, springing through the open window on the soft, smooth grass, he was soon lost amid great green branches of the cherry and walnut trees, which grew so luxuriantly in the pleasure-grounds.





CHAPTER III.

THE OLD HOME.

' Crossing with Christ the chasm,
As it were by a single thread ;
Fording with Him the river—
Christ leading, as He hath led.

' Then up the heights of glory,
Unfollowed by death, or sin ;
Swift through the pearl-white portal
Thy feet have entered in.'

THE Raynalls' tour abroad was abruptly cut short by the very alarming indisposition of Mrs. Raynall. It was not that she had any acute attack of illness, but only an increased lassitude and weakness—the effect, the doctors said, of the extreme heat on her delicate frame. A fortnight after the occurrence of the events recorded in our previous chapter, found the little party in their own home in Bedfordshire. After her arrival at Hilstone, Mrs.

Raynall rallied for a time ; but soon all the worst symptoms of her illness appeared with increased virulence. Blanche, the only other member of the family, was summoned from school, and soon the house wore that indescribably still, hushed look which characterizes the abode of serious sickness.

In the suspense and anxiety which filled Constance's heart at this very unexpected turn in her beloved mother's illness, all other anxieties were swallowed up. Day and night she watched that gentle mother, ministering to all her wants, never so satisfied as when by her side. Blanche, who was a few years younger than Constance, and whose devotion to her sister was the romance of her life, was at first too happy to find herself again at home, and without the obnoxious *surveillance* of her late governess, Miss Hopperton, to be capable of taking in the real danger in which the precious life so precariously hung. But soon even her wild spirits were hushed in the agony that filled her heart when the worst was believed. In striking contrast to Constance's quiet earnestness and enjoined self-control, she gave herself up to the most distressing fits of grief ; her sister's

anxiety being not a little increased by the care which it became necessary to bestow on her also.

Alone by her mother's side Constance knelt one evening. Nurse had lain down in the adjoining room to please her young mistress ; but not to sleep. Mr. Raynall had ridden to the neighbouring town, Constance knew not for what. Blanche had wept herself to sleep ; and only the stars, as they looked down on the solemn scene, kept watch with the patient girl. Only the stars, did we say? No ; there was His presence in that chamber of death !—the presence of Him who hung out these glittering lamps in the dark vault of heaven, who was the heart's hope of mother and child alike : more they needed not.

It was a delicious evening in August. The window near which the invalid's couch was drawn opened out upon the velvety lawn, with its soft terraces sloping downwards to the flower-beds, which to-day had looked so gay in the pride of their summer beauty. Up and down the lattice twined the sweet jessamine, while fragrant roses clustered in luxuriant profusion, peeping with their

blushing faces in on *her*, and breathing, as it were, to her a soft good-night. The faintest evening breeze stole in at the open window,

‘Laden with the honeyed breath of many a fragrant flower.’

It stirred the wavy hair on *her* pale brow, while she lay in a fitful broken doze ; and what memories it stirred in her poor heart who watched the sufferer ! What happy hours she had passed in this sweet, still room ! All through her mother's failing health she had been her close companion, and her comforter. Her joy had been to be with her, to minister to her, to talk to her, and listen to her words ; and, when the wearied frame could only rest and be still, to gaze on her, and live in the luxury of being beside her. Not that the hours in this chamber of peace had been spent in listless ease, or in ministering only to the invalid mother. No ! in the earlier stages of her illness, before their recent visit abroad, there had been the most systematic arrangement of their time, and a useful filling up of all its hours.

First and foremost was the care bestowed on the spiritual culture of their souls. Then there was regular reading and exchange of thought on the

books they read, plans of usefulness were devised and carried out, missions of Christian love were organized to the poor and sick on their own estate and in the neighbourhood ; while, over and above all, the sweetest lessons of patience and resignation were taught by her whose earthly life was fading away.

And now, as Constance rose and gazed out upon the evening landscape, it seemed as if all the glow and warmth of her young life were like that landscape, giving place to a chill, grey twilight. The flowers were closing their eyes, and the woods were silent ; the twittering swallows were all asleep, and now and then a black bat flapped through the dull air. Out of the depths of her heart she cried to the Lord.

Her heart closed over His promises ; her trembling spirit reposed on His tender breast, and she felt that she was not alone.

A little flutter on the couch brought Constance again to her mother's side. Once more those eyes looked out upon her. A heavenly smile lit up the pale, sweet face. She faintly clasped the little hands which pressed her own, and murmured,

‘My love, He has said, “I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee.”’

‘And He is here, mamma,’ said Constance as she dropped her head upon her mother’s breast.

‘I know it, love. And now—He—has—come. We shall meet—yon—der, in His bright—home—’ And the gentle spirit passed away from all of earth, to be with Christ in the heavenly places.

‘Jesus, my Saviour, in Thy face
The essence lives of every grace ;
All other things that charm the sight
Are shadows, tipped with glow-worm light.

‘Thy beauty, Lord, the enraptured eye
That fully views it, first must die ;
Then let me die, that I may know
The joy I seek in vain below.’

Constance Raynall rose on the tide of her bereavement and sorrow. Hitherto her life had been one of much happiness ; few clouds had crossed her sunny path. In her bright, early days she gave her heart to Christ, and consecrated herself to His sweet service. And now, when the storm gathered and burst over her young head, He did not fail her. True, she

trembled at the new, strange way by which her heavenly Father now led her, fearful lest, under the test of suffering, she should faint or fall. But all the more earnest was her prayer for grace and strength, that she might be permitted to honour Him whom her soul loved, by patient suffering. How largely her prayer was answered we shall see.

Her care for her father and Blanche was touching to observe. Girl though she was, she had not lived in the society of such a mother as hers in vain. She had learnt, in the forgetfulness of self, and the devotion—from the highest motives—to the good of others, to find her true home-sphere. Every effort was put forth to interest and cheer her father: she read with him, and walked and drove; listened to his fruitless regrets over some unfortunate money speculations into which he had entered, and marvelled in her secret heart, that, after a loss like his, any affairs so small could affect him so powerfully. She studied with Blanche, throwing herself heartily into all her interests and pursuits, and attended so minutely to the

comforts and refinements of her home, that the universal feeling of all around towards her was one of admiration and love.

A wise man sought to show his son the nature of a cross. 'See,' said he, holding in his hand two slips of wood—a long and a shorter one—'this long piece represents God's will, and this shorter piece, man's. Lay these side by side, and you have no cross; lay them athwart, and immediately you have one.' Even so was Constance Raynall's will in sweet harmony with her heavenly Father's, and such was the secret of the healthful tone of her spirit, and of the beautiful consistency of her life.

The autumn and winter had passed away; and spring, with its reviving verdure, was again smiling through its tears. The mysterious longings which the heart at such a season knows, were filling Constance's spirit; some fresh buds of feeling were peeping forth from among the withered leaves of departed hopes, when one morning, as she and Blanche—having carried their books to the arbour—were busy with their tasks, Mr. Raynall suddenly appeared before

them ; and bidding Blanche very unceremoniously return to the house, he seated himself beside Constance.

Since the morning at Lucerne, when the usually pliable and obedient Constance had asserted her right to judge in a matter so important to her as the choice of a husband, Mr. Raynall had wakened up to the fact that his daughter had a quiet but quite decided will of her own. Considerably puzzled by his discovery, Mr. Raynall manifested towards her, not unfrequently, a demeanour curiously combining reserve on the one hand, and on the other an almost tyrannical interference in all her pursuits and plans.

She bore it all with the most graceful submission, attributing much of his irritability to the desolating stroke which had deprived him of the best and gentlest of wives. Of late he had been much from home, coming and going in the most erratic style ; and when at home, not, certainly, adding either to its comfort or cheerfulness.

‘You toil yourself to death with that girl,’

he muttered as Blanche disappeared among the trees.

'Papa, Blanche is the most affectionate and lovable girl possible. She is getting on so well with all her lessons too. You will not, I am sure, repent of having allowed me to have her at home.'

'She may be improving in her English grammar perhaps—and great need she had—but she certainly is no beauty. She grows plainer every day, upon my word.'

'I do not agree with you, papa, really; she may not be pretty, but what a *piquant* face she has! And she is a dear, generous girl!'

'Very odd she could not get on with Miss Hopperton!'

'Miss Hopperton was not capable of training such a girl as Blanche, papa; and Blanche disliked her so exceedingly, that she was really wretched under her care. I was never more thankful than when you and mamma sent out governess away, and Blanche to school.'

'It was not my doing, sending Miss Hopperton away; and Blanche should have been made

to like her, and submit to her too. She is a spoilt, self-willed thing.'

'Really, dear papa, you are mistaken in our darling. But if you are to be at home now, you will judge for yourself.'

Mr. Raynall fidgeted and became very red, then stammered out, 'I'm sorry you don't admire Miss Hopperton, for I've asked her here.'

'Asked Miss Hopperton!' exclaimed Constance, in a perfect bewilderment of surprise at the announcement, for during that lady's sojourn at Hilstone there had been nothing but jealousies and dispeace.

'I suppose I am at liberty to invite any one I choose to my own place,' warming himself up into a fit of imaginary injured innocence.

'Oh! papa,' said Constance, blushing deeply, 'pardon me if I spoke too hastily in my surprise. Is she coming?'

'Yes!'

'We shall endeavour, then, to make her visit as comfortable as possible. And she will have nothing to do with Blanche, when it is only a visit.'

‘Constance, I have asked her to marry me ——’

‘Papa!’

‘And the marriage will take place next month.’

The wedding took place in London; and after an unusually short tour the newly married couple repaired to Hilstone House.

The new Mrs. Raynall was, to speak in gentle terms, not attractive; plain-looking; and, with a hitherto ungratified passion for rule and reign, it really seemed as if now her arrogance and assumption ran riot.

It was a terrible wound to Constance's loving nature, to see her own mother's pretty boudoir, with all its elegances, pass into this woman's hands. Without a murmur, however, she saw it done. It was perhaps, after all, but natural; and also that her mother's picture should be taken down, and a new full-length portrait of the lady herself be suspended alongside of Mr. Raynall. It was also, doubtless, very reasonable that the furniture should be declared too faded and old, and an elaborate order be given to a London house for executing new furnishings.

But, somehow, the haste and the rough manner in which the alterations were pushed forward, *did* and *would* grate harshly on the sensitive sisters' hearts.

For her own sinister ends, Mrs. Raynall for a time contrived to keep up a smooth exterior with Constance, secretly disliking her all the time for her beauty and attractiveness. The mask fell at last, and endless were the petty tortures she inflicted on the unrepining girl. But when she turned to Blanche, and by her injudicious and ruinous treatment provoked the proud girl to answer sharply back,—goaded her to call up reminiscences of the days when as her governess she sat only in the schoolroom,—all the worst feelings of the stepmother's heart were stirred.

She complained constantly to Mr. Raynall, represented herself as a martyr to the jealousy of his children, and so exasperated Mr. Raynall, that this once peaceful home became the scene of most painful jars.

Blanche, in her misery, had her darling Constance as her refuge. Yet, with all her affection, Constance felt how little was in her power,

when the aim of her stepmother plainly was to crush and keep beneath her feet those who had once been her superiors in rank. Could she but have called to mind the conduct which had so characterized Constance, even towards the woman whom she could not respect, surely she would have paused before prosecuting a course so very cruel in its tone, and so disastrous in its effects.

One evening, for some trivial offence, Mrs. Raynall desired Blanche to keep her room, and not make her appearance at a party which was invited to the house. As one or two of the expected guests were special favourites of Blanche—and of this she knew Mrs. Raynall was aware—her indignation at such treatment was intense. It was the drop to make the cup run over, and vainly did Constance strive to soothe her excitement. The agitation and passion into which Blanche threw herself did not so speedily evaporate as on former similar occasions: she became seriously ill, and her illness was a long and tedious one. Such was the nervous tremor with which she was affected,

that the mere rustle of her stepmother's dress, or her footfall, however noiseless, so increased the fever in her pulse, that the doctor at last had peremptorily to forbid the lady's entrance into the sick-chamber at all.

The crisis in her alarming illness came at last, and Blanche began to recover.

One morning she sat pale and languid in the arm-chair to which she had been promoted, while Constance watched gratefully the little rose-pink colour which was again tinging the invalid's cheeks. Yet, unlike most recoveries, there was anxiety in this; for was there not every reason to dread a repetition on the part of Mrs. Raynall of the treatment which had so shattered Blanche's nerves?

Constance, however, took but 'one step at a time.' She would not dim the present gladness by forecasting clouds across it. Bravely and hopefully she would trust where she could not trace.

As she sat chatting pleasantly to Blanche, and arranging some beautiful fresh flowers which the gardener had just sent in, the morning letters were brought.

Blanche watched her sister's face as she eagerly read a letter the contents of which gave her evident pleasure; and as she finished the perusal, tears glistened on her long, dark eyelashes.

'Well, Conny, what is it?'

'It is a letter from Aunt Mackillop in Edinburgh. I have had one or two *such* kind notes from her during your illness, Blanche; and she writes saying that, now you are convalescent, she hopes we may be spared to go and pay her a long visit in Auld Reekie.'

'Spared!' said Blanche scornfully. 'Kind Auntie little knows ——'

'How very considerate of our dear aunt ——'

'So awfully kind! And oh, Conny,' with sparkling eyes and heightened colour, 'what *could* be more delightful?'

Constance smiled, and thought what a direct answer to her prayers was here; and a great, genuine burst of gladness was in her heart, such as for months she had not known.

As Blanche foresaw, Mrs. Raynall consented to spare them to visit their Scotch grandaunt; and their father, who was heartily tired of the

general discomfort which prevailed, made no objection to the plan.

He had secret misgivings that he should miss Constance terribly, and her unwearied attentions to his comfort ; but he hoped he should be saved from all further scenes with his oversensitive Theodosia, which were beginning to assume a chronic aspect. Thus no obstacle was thrown in the way of the girls' projected visit to the Scotch metropolis.





CHAPTER IV.

HOPE HILL.

'Some murmur when their sky is clear,
And wholly bright to view—
If one small speck of dark appear
In their great heaven of blue.

'And some with thankful love are filled,
If but one gleam of light—
One ray from God's great goodness—gild
The darkness of their night.'

'**Y**E'LL be the young leddies for Hope Hill?' said a middle-aged, respectable-looking woman, who for the last hour had been waiting at the Edinburgh Station of the Caledonian Railway.

The 'young leddies' so addressed were Constance and Blanche Raynall, and the rather grotesque figure was Nelly Proudfoot, Miss Jane Mackillop's maid. She wore a short, scant skirt, which displayed a pair of well-made feet, encased

in white stockings and shoes; a tartan shawl, and a large bonnet with a good deal of cap visible underneath, completed her rather primitive costume.

'Ye're welcome to Edinburgh, young leddies,' she continued. 'The mistress will be sae gled to see ye. I houp ye've met wi' nae mischances on yir long journey. I'm amaist deaf an' doited wi' the noise an' skreechin' o' thae engines; an' I'm sure ye maun be thankfu' to be on solid land again.'

Constance only half understood the literal meaning of this salutation; but there was no mistaking the warm feeling which beamed from the kind, homely face of the speaker. 'Thank you,' she replied heartily. 'Now we must get a fly. Is the stand outside there?'

'A fly! Miss Raynall. What kind o' a fly would serve your present purpose? It's a cab you mean. Oh ay, there's plenty oot by there. It's a guid twa miles to Hope Hill.'

A cab was at last secured, and away they rattled through the quiet streets in the direction of the southern suburbs of the city.

‘What an exquisitely lovely scene!’ exclaimed Constance to Blanche, as, having quitted the streets, they proceeded along the suburban road. ‘This is finer than anything I have ever seen.’

They had just begun, after half an hour’s drive, to ascend the range of low hills which forms so picturesque a setting to the southern suburbs of Edinburgh; and after mounting a short way, a very magnificent panoramic view lay stretched below their feet. It was flanked on the east by Arthur’s Seat and its outlying crags, on the west by the beautifully wooded Corstorphine and Craiglockhart Hills, while between lay the fair city itself in the serene loveliness of a summer evening. Its houses shone like white marble in the setting sun, interspersed with masses of green foliage; the crest of the old town, with its grand castle, its many spires, and huge piles of antiquated houses, presenting an effect singularly picturesque.

‘That’s oor hoose,’ said Nelly, stretching down her neck, and pointing with pride to the dwelling, which she considered perfectly unapproachable for beauty of situation, and intrinsic

cosiness and comfort. On the left-hand side of the road, right in the centre and fronting all the splendid scenery, stood the unpretending abode. It was a small old-fashioned cottage, nestling among thick-grown trees and shrubs, with a portico smothered in roses, now in fullest blow. On either side was a bay-window, and the upper windows peeped through trellis-work laden with jessamine and honeysuckle. A smooth green lawn sloped in front, while a neat and pleasant flower-border stretched on either side of the portico under the bay-windows. Not a tree or shrub intercepted the magnificent view, except two large elms, one on either side of the lawn, like sentinels guarding the peaceful spot. The approach was a plain gravel walk, and entered from the road by a green gate. A pretty green paddock suggested the idea of a cow, which presently, as Nelly appeared, sent forth a friendly low of welcome. Behind the house was a range of low hills, with their shaggy covering of furze, from the midst of which rose fine grey masses of basaltic rock. Here and there a bright tuft of purple heather shone forth ;

and among the soft grassy knolls the blue bell modestly bent its head before the evening breeze.

‘Here we are,’ said Nelly at last, as the cab stopped at the green gate; and bustling off the box, she flung back the gate and motioned to the coachman to drive in.

At the hospitable open door stood Miss Jane Mackillop herself. As the girls alighted, flushed with excitement at finding themselves so unexpectedly in the midst of such beauties of scenery, she pressed them to her heart, in an embrace so warm, so true, that with difficulty Constance could keep back the gathering tears from her eyes.

‘My dears, I’m so very glad to see you both,’ was her quiet greeting; and while Nelly and her *aide-de-camp* Janet attended carefully to the luggage, she, with a hand on the arm of each, ushered them into the house.

‘Aunt Mackillop, is this fairyland?’ said Constance, as standing at the parlour window she gazed out upon the landscape. ‘I had no idea there was anything so fine in——’

‘In Scotland?’ said the lady, smiling.

‘Near Edinburgh at least—I had forgotten

about it ; for you remember I was here once before with mamma—long ago.'

' Oh, but you were too young then to care anything about fine scenery.'

' But I remembered Nelly, Aunt Mackillop. I should, I think, have recognised her anywhere. How kind she has been to us !'

Tea was presently served, and all sorts of tempting viands ; and this first evening at Hope Hill passed pleasantly away. Constance and Blanche were not sorry to retire early to rest ; and, as they lay down in the exquisitely white bed of the not very large room allotted to them, a truer sensation of *home* was in their young hearts than for many days they had known in their own father's house.

Miss Mackillop was neither old nor young, but just, as she herself would have said, ' the age of other people.' She was tall, and had a handsome face, with dark, speaking eyes, and a most sweet expression lurking about the corners of her mouth. She was intelligent, and a great reader ; the books she perused being often beyond the usually prescribed range of female

literature. She was a perfect lady in mind and manners, quite incapable of a coarse thought or action, and of a nature so affectionate and self-sacrificing, that it led her frequently to perform deeds which, if not actually injudicious for others, were often in a very sad degree injurious to herself. She was not robust ; and while her high Christian principle saved her from the fretfulness too common with invalids, the uncertainty of her health was a very great trial. Her means, too, were limited. Hope Hill, with its paddock and its garden and small shrubbery, so neat and so beautifully kept, was rented from a neighbouring proprietor, who was the reverse of liberal. Indeed he kept his tenant in a state of chronic anxiety, as each 'term-time' came round, in the fear of her rent being raised ; and raised, eventually, so heavily as to threaten a possible evacuation of the little paradise. Miss Mackillop, however, was not one to forecast shadows.

A very tender love soon began to grow and gather strength between the maiden aunt and her grandniece Constance.

Widely apart in age, they were nevertheless one in the love which bound them to a personal Lord and Saviour,—one, too, in the intellectual pursuits so dear to each, and in the warm appreciation of worth for its own sake. There was also the special tie between them of love for her who was gone from among them.

Mrs. Raynall was Miss Mackillop's name-child, and in her young days had been much with her aunt, and had often talked of her to Constance; while in the tenderest depths of Miss Mackillop's heart the dear one lived enshrined, as the sunbeam that had gleamed across the gloom of many dark days. Many talks they had of her as they sat in the long autumn nights with their work in the snug parlour, Constance listening to the stories of her mother's childhood, telling, in her turn, of the calm, tranquil setting of her earthly sun.

Miss Mackillop soon gathered from the two girls the real state of matters in their home. Slow to speak of her own affairs to strangers, Constance was equally guiltless of the provoking extreme into which some persons run, of

studiously keeping silence on all family and personal matters from those even who would count it a pleasure to share the confidence that might so safely be reposed in them.

Blanche made a *confidante* at once of her kind aunt, pouring out to her all the domestic miseries of their lot. Well was it for the ardent but inconsiderate girl, that the recipient of her highly coloured list of grievances was so trusty and true.

And now Christmas was hastening on—the tacit but understood limit of the happy visit to Hope Hill.

‘Oh, Constance,’ said Blanche one morning to her sister, who stood busy at her easel finishing a pretty little oil sketch of a neighbouring castle Miss Mackillop had expressed a wish to have,—‘aren’t you awfully sorry to think of going back?’

‘I am,’ said Constance, ‘very,’ looking up for a moment from her work.

‘Just as we are beginning to know the place and like the people so much! I do wish we might stay on a bit. I’m sure papa would allow us.’

'I am almost sure he would. But ——'

'But what, Conny?'

'Aunt Mackillop is not rich, darling; and I know we put her to a good deal of expense.'

Blanche looked confounded. That, certainly, was a view of the case that had never dawned on her easy mind.

'We shall see,' said her sister, 'what answer papa sends to my last letter asking for directions as to our plans.'

'Oh yes; we'll wait till then for fresh troubles.'

'Well, Conny, don't you like the Bryces fearfully? The more I know them, the better I like them. Rachel is a capital girl; and the delicate twins, poor things, they are wonderfully plucky. And Kenneth is very nice—very'—blushing a little as she spoke.

'They *are* exceedingly kind—gayer than my taste approves; but their attention and hospitality to us have been very great.'

'Kenneth says he is going to get this lovely thing you have done of their great beech tree framed,' Blanche rattled on, lifting from her sister's portfolio a nearly finished water-colour

of a magnificent beech. 'He says you beat all the Scotch girls hollow. Mary and Bella would give *anything* to be me to have you to teach them, Conny; and well they might.'

'Would they?' said Constance in a tone that startled Blanche in its earnestness.

'Yes indeed! But I said you had enough to do with *me*, and that it would make you ill to teach any more girls.'

'Oh,' said Constance, laughing, 'you make yourself out a sad task, Blanche.'

At last Mr. Raynall's letter came, and great was the consternation which its contents at first struck into Constance's poor heart. Mrs. Raynall, whose aim to be rid of her stepdaughters was intensified by the undisturbed sway which she had exercised during their present visit to Scotland, laid her plans to perpetuate this, in a way meant to be very skilful.

Mr. Marjoribanks, whose perception was not the most delicate, renewed his addresses to Constance at the juncture of her leaving Hilstone, and had even threatened a visit to Hope Hill. Constance replied in a very spirited and decided

style, expressing her great astonishment that, after the manner in which his advances before had been received, he should again have thought of repeating them,—reiterating her assurance that her mind was entirely and irrevocably made up on the subject. Mr. Marjoribanks, whose pride was wounded by her persistent declinature, confided to her father the terms of her reply. Mr. Raynall stormed, and vowed she should be made to eat in her words.

In consultation with Mrs. Raynall, it occurred to that lady to make a handle of this affair to turn the wheel of her own schemes. She represented to Mr. Raynall, that the only way to bring a high-spirited girl like Constance to a sense of her duty and her opportunities was by putting on the screw, and that, as long as he continued his handsome allowances to her and Blanche, she would remain inflexible and hard. 'Make Mr. Marjoribanks,' she concluded, 'the alternative of her returning home or remaining with Miss Mackillop, and you will very soon see the wind change.' She knew in her heart that she spoke against her convictions on the

subject, but she also knew that such a consideration would be all-powerful with Mr. Raynall, the longing of whose heart was to see Constance Mrs. Marjoribanks, and mistress of all the grand Welsh castles and lands. And as the want of his daughter, with her winning ways and kind attentions to himself, was a source of incessant murmuring on the part of Mr. Raynall, she proposed that his niece Julia Raynall—her own obedient servant, and a lively rattle—should be asked to come and pay a long visit at Hilstone; Blanche should be invited to return home *alone*,—an invitation which the wily woman knew was tantamount to closing the doors of her father's house against her.

Such, in substance, were the contents of her father's letter to Constance,—a letter which filled her young heart with the most sorrowful emotions.

After a prayerful consideration of the matter, she went to Miss Mackillop, resolved to confide it all to her—sure of the best advice which her kind, motherly heart could give.

She found her aunt at her desk, just closing

a letter which she had been writing to Mr. Raynall.

‘My love,’ she said before Constance had time to say a word about her own letter, ‘I hope you are not tired of being with me; I cannot really part with my girls, and I have just written to your papa asking him to allow you both to spend the winter and spring with me. I have held out the inducement of masters in Edinburgh—especially Herr —— for music. When the summer comes, we shall know if the parting will be less hard.’

‘Oh! Aunt Mackillop,’ was all Constance could utter as she placed her father’s letter in the good lady’s hand: ‘how kind—how very, very kind!’

‘Blanche’s less keen and sensitive nature was not so much stirred by the contents of her father’s letter as Constance had feared. ‘It is all *her* doing!’ she exclaimed in a burst of passion. ‘And there’s nothing too cruel for her.’ But all other emotions were speedily swallowed up in the joyful fact of their prolonged residence at Hope Hill. Bright visions danced before her eyes, of classes in Edin-

burgh, interspersed with skating lessons from Kenneth Bryce, and Christmas gaieties and fun.

Constance, however, had grave anxieties on her thoughtful mind. The obstacle to her return home, put as it now was, seemed permanent and invincible. Mrs. Raynall, she believed, had availed herself of it, to keep them in what would henceforth assume the form of a self-imposed banishment from home. She could almost fancy she saw the well-assumed artlessness with which her stepmother, in answer to inquiries after them, would insinuate rebellion to her father's will as the sole cause for their protracted absence from home.

Her own satisfaction at remaining with her aunt was great ; but equally great was the felt necessity cast upon her, to see to it that she should suffer no privation from her generous kindness to them.

What greatly crippled Miss Mackillop's means, was the fact of a spendthrift nephew—Tom Mackillop, now in Australia—who was ever applying to her for money to deliver him out of what, but for her aid, would be 'disastrous

circumstances ;' while the debts which he had contracted when in Edinburgh were only now being slowly and painfully met by his aunt.

Constance knew also of the little pet scheme which for years had been her aunt's,—to save out of her slender income money enough to purchase Hope Hill, should it ever be for sale. While Constance was revolving all this in her mind, and mapping out her plans and projects, Miss Mackillop had arrived at another conclusion on the subject, no less decided. She resolutely and cheerfully put from her altogether the hope of purchasing her little paradise.

'What does it signify if *my* schemes are thwarted,' she said to herself, 'if I can do present good with what is in my power? I had rather share a garret and a crust of bread with that noble girl—yes, a thousand times—than I'd live even amid your loveliness, my bonnie Hope Hill, and *she* suffering—lonely and really homeless.'

The results of these firm but quite contrary resolutions on the part of Miss Mackillop and Constance will presently appear.

A few weeks after all these occurrences had taken place, Constance, radiant with the flush of a winter's walk upon her beautiful face, entered the parlour, where her aunt sat writing.

'What a charming afternoon!' exclaimed the young girl. 'Won't you have a turn, auntie dear, before dinner?' And, seating herself on a stool at her aunt's feet, she looked lovingly up into her face, and said, 'I scarcely know when I have been so happy, dear aunt—never, I think, since mamma's last illness.'

A bright smile lighted up Miss Mackillop's face as she caught the glow of the young girl's spirit.

'You look so, my love,' said the lady, passing her hand over the soft, smooth, upturned face. 'How do Mary and Bella get on?'

'Oh, so very well! and really the stimulus is doing Blanche immense good. She is quite surprising me by her progress in drawing, and in her English lessons too.'

Yes. Constance was now fairly installed as daily governess at Burn Braes, a pretty neighbouring place, about half a mile down the hill

from the cottage. The playfully expressed wish on the girls' part to have her for their teacher was actually realized, to the great satisfaction of both teacher and pupils.

When Constance called on Mrs. Bryce to ask her to help her to some private teaching, it occurred to her, as the best and readiest means for accomplishing her necessity, now 'to do for themselves.' It was the result of no feverish excitement, but of a calm purpose,—a step, too, which she felt herself (thanks to her own first-rate education) quite competent to take. Mrs. Bryce directly asked her to begin with her own little girls, who were too delicate to go into Edinburgh for classes, and who had taken a very great fancy for Miss Raynall. Constance stated her terms, which were high; but Mrs. Bryce readily assented, seeming all the more to value the services from the high rate put upon them. Blanche was invited to share the lessons,—a great saving of time to Constance, and a healthful stimulus, Mrs. Bryce felt sure, for Mary and Bella. Other three young ladies were added to the select little party; and very

soon Constance's entire forenoons came to be spent at Burn Braes. Her afternoons were devoted either to her aunt or to study, and in the evening there was reading or practice with Blanche in music and singing. Constance was regular and systematic in her work, seldom admitting any interruptions to her prescribed arrangement of her time, enjoying all the more the weekly holiday, when the Saturday came round, that the preceding days had been so busily and usefully filled up. Miss Mackillop had many friends, both among the neighbouring families and in Edinburgh; and the attractiveness of Hope Hill was not a little enhanced by the presence there of her interesting young nieces. Blanche was ever ready to join any party of pleasure; but Constance was more difficult to wile from her studies and her tasks. Her pleasure at the variety, for Blanche's sake, was great; and for her sake, too, she would sometimes make one in the holiday walk, or luncheon-party at Burn Braes. Her path, however, she felt, was plain and straight. Nor did she weary in her self-imposed

duties. Excitement is great, but repose is greater still. It is a comparatively easy thing in a moment of strong excitement to achieve a noble deed, or in the flush of generous enthusiasm to commit some act of heroic self-sacrifice; but the courage that nerves to the patient, hearty fulfilling of the monotonous round of duty—to the dull circle of sameness in an uneventful, quiet life—is a nobler thing by far. The inspiration for such service is caught from heaven itself, and is kept flowing and fresh only by renewed streams from the same living fountain.





CHAPTER V.

BLIGHTED HOPES.

' Let thy gold be cast in the furnace,
Thy red gold, precious and bright ;
Do not fear the hungry fire,
With its caverns of burning light ;
And thy gold shall return more precious,
Free from every spot and stain ;
For gold must be tried by fire,
As a heart is tried by pain.

' In the cruel fire of sorrow
Cast thy heart, do not faint or wail,
Let thy hand be firm and steady,
Do not let thy spirit quail ;
But wait till the trial is over,
And take thy heart again ;
For as gold is tried by fire,
So a heart must be tried by pain.

' I shall know by the gleam and glitter
Of the golden chain you wear,
By your heart's calm strength in loving,
Of the fire it has had to bear.

Beat on, true heart, for ever,
Shine bright, strong golden chain ;
And bless the cleansing fire
And the furnace of living pain.'

ADELAIDE ANNE PROCTER.

MERRY Carew found her pupil quite
an adept at croquet.
'I could fancy you had played it
on board ship,' she would say, laughing ; 'only,
that's too ridiculous an idea. Why, you will
beat Mr. Drummond hollow if you go on like
this.'

And Aimée, was she not equally attentive to
the challenged task of teaching Uncle Edulf?
Just when it suited her other engagements, or
fitted in with the peculiar whim of the moment !

She was full of engagements ; and although
in theory she took an ostensible charge of her
guests, she practically left them to her mother's
gentle care. She was free from governesses
and studies, free to flutter in the summer sun-
shine, with no household cares, and, as she
flattered herself, with no responsibilities of any
kind. The self-will of her youth—all unchecked
—had gathered strength, of course, with her

years; and no one in her home thought of thwarting her—no one, for the sake of peace, dared.

She was a lovely girl, tall and slight, with an ease and dash which became her well. She had large hazel eyes, full of intelligence and spirit, with long, drooping eyelashes; a small, pretty mouth, with the most dazzling white teeth, and dimples in her rosy cheeks.

The summer was a peculiarly idle season at Thornfield,—idle as regards any mental or other work; the time being filled up with croquet and garden-parties, boating, riding, and excursions to the different lakes; while an occasional dinner or musical party of a more elaborate kind completed the usual round of gaiety. The house was generally filled with a succession of visitors, and the time glided pleasantly, if not very profitably, away.

Aimée's beauty and high spirits made her quite the centre of attraction; and if her almost proverbial selfishness debarred her from the luxury of forming many friendships among her own sex, she was quite content to be the object

of the general admiration around her—to be the acknowledged ‘Lady of the Lake.’

The adulation she received was fitted to turn wiser heads than hers. But to be first was so natural to her, that while the absence of such worship would have been felt and resented, the continued expression of it was really to her a mere matter of course.

‘Uncle Edulf, come and ride with me,’ she exclaimed, running into the library one morning soon after the incidents recorded in our opening chapter.

Her uncle was writing, and papers lay about, betokening business and work.

He jumped up as she spoke, and with mock submission bowed low, and said, ‘Your humble servant, lady fair; but I cannot come immediately: my despatches must go by to-day’s post, and I have a good hour’s writing yet before me.’

‘Oh, bother papers! That’s like papa. He just makes business, I am sure, whenever he doesn’t want to do things I tell him. But I always get him to do what I want; so come, Uncle Edulf. I like riding with you; and

mamma, besides, says I am not to mount Gold-dust again, without having you or papa with me.'

She hustled his papers together as she spoke; but he quietly answered, 'I shall be charmed to ride with you, Aimée; but I cannot yet: my letters are of importance, and must go to-day.'

'Oh! well, if you prefer fusty old letters to riding with me, you must follow your own tastes. But I can't wait, so I shall just go alone.'

She flounced out of the room as she spoke, and a few minutes afterwards passed the window mounted on Gold-dust.

'Is Aimée gone riding alone on that wild Arab?' said Mrs. Waldegrave, coming into the room.

'I fear she has,' said Edulf. 'But, Franey, why do you allow her if you are afraid of the beast?'

'Oh! it's a pity to thwart her. But I shall be miserable till she returns.'

'Couldn't she have ridden Norma this morning?'

'Oh! I suggested that, but she said she would

sooner not ride at all, than mount an old cow like her.'

'I don't see Sadler coming,' said Edulf, going to the window.

'Oh, she won't have Sadler! She says she feels like a prisoner on parole with a groom behind her.'

'She is very rash, and——'

'Oh, she is so full of spirit, and the love of freedom—a good deal of my own feeling,' added Mrs. Waldegrave. 'I never could endure a groom.'

'Had I known all that, I would have gone with her for your sake, Franey,' said Edulf, looking at his watch and resuming his writing. 'I shall make haste, however, and try and meet her. But it is very selfish of her to keep you in this anxiety all the time she is away.'

'Oh! I'm used to it. But it does give me a sad headache,' said poor Mrs. Waldegrave, pressing her hand on her forehead, and wearily laying herself down upon the couch.

'It is, to say the very least, so inconsiderate of Aimée,' said Edulf decidedly.

'Oh, well,' said Mrs. Waldegrave, who, whatever her own convictions of Aimée's self-will, could never tolerate a critical word from any other; 'it's her chief and favourite recreation. Aimée, you know, is not a reader, nor a musician. She cares nothing for in-door occupation, but her heart is in the open air, on horseback, or following the hounds. She should have been a boy, for that part;' and with a burst of genuine motherly pride she added, 'She does ride splendidly, does she not?'

'Beautifully; but that is no reason why she should risk her life and keep you in this constant torment.'

'Oh, but she says she must do it.'

'How does she do about gates and fences?'

'Leaps them. Just the other day she was out; and at Barnard's farm, you remember, there is a gate opening into the path through the woods. Aimée called to some children who were lounging about the gate, to open it; but, either they didn't understand, or didn't choose to obey her. Very much annoyed, she exclaimed, "If you don't open instantly, I'll clear

the wall and ride in among your corn." And she suited the action to the word, to Mr. Barnard's great consternation, who was hastening to the gate. Now don't let me interrupt your writing, Edulf, any longer.'

Aimée returned from her ride safe and unscathed, to find poor Mrs. Waldegrave in the agonies of a nervous headache, from real alarm at her daughter's protracted absence.

'Oh, mamma, how could you fret so?' said Aimée, kneeling down by her mother's side, and coaxingly kissing the pale, anxious face. 'Why *should* you be so afraid? I haven't surely ridden all my life, to be thrown at last or killed!'

'But, Aimée, you are *so* reckless.'

'Indeed I'm not. But I do not care, and never will, to ride quiet, meek, old things like Norma and Co. They are all very well for Miss Witherington, who can't see anything beyond her horse's head, and bows to cows and things, thinking they're people.'

'Oh, Aimée, Aimée,' said Mrs. Waldegrave, laughing in spite of herself, 'you are too severe.'

But I hope you will ask Miss Witherington to go with you to-morrow. She really seems hurt at your flying off without her, as you so constantly do.'

'Why can't papa ride with her? And there's Uncle Edulf now. Oh no, he's too good. I'll keep him for myself. I hope you'll have no horrid letters to-morrow to pore over just when I want you to come with me,' she added, looking somewhat askance at her uncle. 'And, mamma, *don't* ask Vincent to the dinner-party next week, remember. Mr. Drummond says he's very unintellectual, and—and—prosy; and I don't want him.'

'I have asked him, my dear,' said Mrs. Waldegrave, with a rather relieved look.

'Oh, mamma—well, tell him not to come, then. We're just dosed with him.'

'And with some other people besides,' thought Edulf, as at this moment the Rectory carriage appeared coming down the approach.

'Ah,' said Aimée, starting up, 'there's Mrs. Beresford, and Elsie, and Mr. Drummond.'

The party stayed to luncheon; and Elsie, Mr.

Drummond's second daughter, a tall shy girl in her teens, but with a winsome expression about her rather heavy face, hovered round Aimée, for whom her admiration seemed intense.

'You must allow Aimée to drive back with us,' said Mrs. Beresford to Mrs. Waldegrave as they left the luncheon-table. 'We have a little garden-party this afternoon, and there is a seat for her in the carriage.'

'Oh yes, please,' said Elsie as she clung round Aimée.

Mrs. Waldegrave hesitated, thinking of Miss Witherington and the Misses Abbot, who had just arrived on a visit; but Aimée's decided 'Oh yes, I must go, mamma,' settled the matter, and she started with her friends in the highest glee. In the cool of the evening she was brought safely home, under the careful escort of Mr. Drummond.

The evening of the dinner-party came at last. Aimée had all her own way about the guests, with the exception of Vincent Durant, who was among the number. There were the Beresfords and Mr. Drummond, Sir Peter Carew and

Lady Anne, and Merry of course ; Mr. and Mrs. Blamire of the Cedars ; and a few others of the *élite* of the neighbouring families. Vincent Durant was a special favourite of Mrs. Waldegrave, and she had hopes that Aimée was not really so vehement in her dislike of the prospective young baronet as her impulsive and almost rude manner towards him often led her to fear. He, poor young man, was indeed her humble slave ; and so meekly did he bear with all her fickle humours and caprice, that a casual observer might have been tempted to believe that his dull spirit was insensible to her scorn, but for the heightened colour on his beardless face, and the momentary flash in his heavy eye. The indifference he met with seemed only to whet the ardour of his passion for the saucy but beautiful girl, and the presence of any favoured rival very nearly drove him out of the few stray wits he might be supposed to possess. Aimée filled his heart and mind ; yet her quiet undisguised distaste and weariness of his company might have cooled the ardour of any one less infatuated than himself.

It was a July evening, and one of the loveliest conceivable—one to see Thornfield to perfection, basking in the sunshine, in all the pride of its summer beauty. The large drawing-room windows looked down upon the clear, shining lake—their verandahs laden with choicest flowers; while at one end was a conservatory, filled also with the most delicious and odoriferous plants.

The furniture was of black Indian wood, richly carved, and the mirrors reflected the opposite range of mountains, with their ever-varying tints and shades. Every sort of ornament and novelty lay about the charming room—specimens of beautiful mosaic wood-work from Sarento, with vases from Florence, and curious jugs from Pompeii; while the most exquisite collection of photographs lay beside a fine stereoscope, and innumerable slides were piled up by a microscope, which Mr. Waldegrave delighted to exhibit. The beautifully mown lawn outside looked like a velvet carpet, and the gardens showed to advantage, with their bejewelled borders of variegated flowers, and smartly trimmed shrubs and rose trees.

A perfect earthly paradise, within and without, was Thornfield House on this lovely summer's eve.

A few minutes before seven, Captain Ellicombe entered the drawing-room.

'Edulf,' said the Squire, who held in his hand a slip of paper, the contents of which he was painfully endeavouring to get by heart, 'here is a choice for you. Will you have as your partner at dinner, Miss Carew, Miss Railton, or ——' But here the entrance of others of the guests left Edulf's alternative hanging on the Squire's lips, and himself provokingly indifferent as to his approaching fate.

Presently Miss Witherington sailed in, dressed in a rich peach-coloured silk, glittering all over with jewels, and looking just a trifle more than usually alive. Next came the Misses Abbot, in blue silk dresses made identically the same, with white jessamine in their hair. And then appeared Aimée, in her exquisitely cool white dress, with wreaths of purple heather and blue bells amid the rich bands of her hair and about her dress.

An unusual flush of excitement was upon her fair cheek, and a look of expectant pleasure was in her speaking eye.

Presently the brilliant party was assembled, and Edulf found himself paired off with Miss Grantham.

Miss Witherington, who seemed through her glass to fancy herself motioned to sit down on his other side, took her seat accordingly, and instantly commenced a conversation so vacant, and yet evidently intended to be so bewitching, that Edulf's exertions soon became divided between trying to listen, and to preserve himself from overt acts of yawning. This young lady was positively wearing herself away, in her feverish desire and endeavour to captivate Captain Ellicombe; and the present chance—which he contrived to make a rare one—of a *tête-à-tête* was not to be thrown away.

After some very vapid remarks upon the weather, upon the relative attractions of the different lakes, and the contemplated enjoyment of an excursion to Patterdale, a rather painful and awkward collapse in the conversation took

place; and Edulf seized the favourable lull to turn to his neighbour on his other side, to whom he was in duty bound to attend.

Miss Grantham, a lively, dashing girl, with more sparkle in her manner than beauty in her face, seemed ready and willing to meet any attentions. She had the most wonderful fluency of speech, equalled only by her apparent knowledge of everybody, and of every detail in everybody's life and lot. Her conversation, which, after all, was a mere retail of gossip, was lively and brilliant as compared with Miss Witherington's dull twaddle; and if her knowledge of facts was somewhat slipshod, there was a good-natured rattle in her tone, which saved it from being sarcastic or keen.

'What a dull man this is beside me!' she said, after the ice between her and Edulf was broken.

'This man?' said Edulf, pointing to himself.

'Oh, Captain Ellicombe,' laughing. 'But who is he?'

'I do not know.'

'Try and find out. His name begins with

B—Breacon or Bacon or something. But I have made such a slip! Mr. Waldegrave gave me a quiet hint that he was very sensitive about the length of his nose,—it *is* something fearful, you must admit,—and in his kind, off-hand way suggested that I should look—well—as if I really was not conscious whether he *had* a nose or not. And I have been like the person possessed with but one idea ever since we sat down; and, what between the agonized terror of being caught looking, and the fascination which would make me look, I am very nearly in a state of coma. Whatever the subject of conversation, I have thought of nothing but this prominent feature of his face. And just now, when I wished the salt, I said—oh yes, I really did—“Will you make a long—not *arm*, but—*nose*, and pass me the salt?” So I have done for myself *there*,’ she added, blushing and laughing in a low subdued tone.

‘And now you turn your thoughts, or your one sublime thought, towards me,’ said Edulf gaily, ‘I must be upon the defensive at once.’

‘Oh, Captain Ellicombe!’ But with consider-

able tact abruptly changing the conversation, she added, 'What a lovely bouquet in the centre of the table!'

'Beautiful!'

'Do you care for flowers?'

'Extremely.'

'What is your favourite flower?'

'The rose.'

'Which one?'

'The dark damask red.'

'Like these?' pointing to some she wore in her hair.

'Exactly!' with animation; and his thoughts flew to *her* in whose lovely dark hair he remembered roses such as these had clustered the night—*that* night—at Lucerne.

He unconsciously relapsed into silence.

'What are you thinking of?' she at last exclaimed, quite incapable of tolerating this silence.

He started slightly, but replied, 'I was thinking of something that happened, just on such a night as this, two long years ago.'

'What happened?'

He looked intently at her, but did not speak.

'Where were you then?'

'Abroad.'

'How delicious! In Switzerland?'

'Yes, at Lucerne.'

'And did something sad happen?'

'No—yes ——'

'Or something pleasant?'

'Very.'

What a riddle he was! And she could not tell whether he was purposely puzzling her or not.

'Did you know the D'Arcys at Lucerne? They usually spend some weeks there every season.'

'No, I did not.'

'They are fearfully rich, and travel about in great style.'

'That was, probably, how I missed them.'

'There was a marriage, a few weeks ago, of an old friend of my uncle Edward to a girl he met at Lucerne.'

'Ah!'

'A Mr. Marjoribanks.'

'Really!' with roused interest.

‘He is tremendously rich; and, it seems, has been for years enamoured of this young lady—since *she* was a mere child.’

Edulf turned his dark blue eyes full upon Miss Grantham, and, while every drop of blood seemed to rush from his face, he said quietly, ‘Who was the lady?’

‘A Miss Raynall. She couldn’t bear him, it seems. But her father is married again, and she and the stepmother used to fight; and so old Mr. Raynall said she must either marry this old lover, or go out as a poor governess; and of course she married.’

‘Are you sure of all this?’ said Edulf in a tone of ill-disguised agony.

‘Perfectly certain. Uncle Edward and Mr. Marjoribanks are great friends. He sent a beautiful bracelet to the bride: I saw it.’

‘And what? Where has Con—where are they?’

‘They are travelling somewhere. There was a little son born at Hilstone,—that is the Raynalls’ place,—and he is heir to the estate, for the other son was drowned, and the step-

mother is awfully proud about it all ; and now that the daughter has married to please her father, they all get on capitally ; and, oh yes, I remember now where they went to—some splendid Welsh castle of Mr. Marjoribanks'. Mr. and Mrs. Raynall have already gone to visit them there.'

'Constance' was the sole burden of Edulf's distracted thoughts all through the rest of this long, sad evening. Constance ! in her purity—in her simple beauty—in her sweet Christian devotion and courage,—what had come over her noble spirit ! He was startled to discover how, since he had known and loved her, he had linked her in every passage of his life !—how, as his own new life had grown clearer and brighter,—as the wonders of God's redeeming grace dawned upon his mind in connection with the diligent and earnest study of the Word,—his heart ever in its silent musings reverted to *her* whose hand had, as it were, unlocked the gate which admitted him into this garden of peace and purest joy !

Thus her image pursued him, alike in his waking and sleeping hours ; and whether in the still night as he kept his lone watch in the

gallant ship, or in the busier moments of the day as he went his round of duty or toil, it seemed to him as if

‘ Her spirit of love kept a watch over him,’

and that he had acquired a right to her sympathy and love, with which none could or ought to interfere. And had he not come home in the delicious anticipation of telling her all this, and in the ardent, lover-like sanguineness of hope that all obstacles might be overcome by a love so constant and so deep as his!

And now she was lost to him for ever; and the death-blow to his own earthly happiness was equalled only by bewildering surprise at the unaccountable step which, with her high principle, she had been forced to take.

All his arrangements were made to start for Bedfordshire the following week, having most reluctantly but unavoidably been detained from setting out ere now by necessary business with the Squire.

But now his dream was dispelled. His

‘ great heaven of blue
Was beclouded and in gloom.’—

Reader! have you known what it is to have a cup of joy suddenly dashed from your lips,—to have, instead of a deep current of happiness, a dry, dismal blank in your heart, to look out upon the ‘beautiful earth,’ which yesterday looked so fair, and to see it to-day

‘Dark and cold and dreary,’

—to feel a burden upon your spirit, and a heavy languor over your mind deadening and dispiriting you?—then you will know something of the weight which in this hour of anguish fell over Edulf Ellicombe’s bright youth, and flung him like a castaway upon the strand of life.





CHAPTER VI.

RESIGNATION.

' So even the greatest griefs
May be reliefs,
Could he but take them right, and in their ways,
Happy is he whose heart
Hath found the art
To turn his double pains to double praise.'

' Arise, sad heart, if thou dost not withstand,
Christ's resurrection thine may be ;
Do not by hanging down break from the hand
That, as it rises, raiseth thee.'

HERBERT.

HERDULF ELLICOMBE, alone and in the heart-solitude of his great grief, recovered the blow which in its sudden severity so terribly startled and stunned him. Hitherto, in his own unobtrusive yet most telling way, he had, as the servant of God, been seeking to live somewhat up to his high privilege ; and now that the earthly sunshine of his life had

given place to the dull, cold twilight, he looked upwards trustfully to heaven, and, catching His inspiration whose meat and drink it had been to do His Father's will, he breathed forth the prayer, 'O Lord, truly I am Thy servant. As Thou hast helped me in the pleasant paths, do not Thou forsake me in the dark and cloudy day.'

Such a prayer never was unanswered, and a holy peace filled his aching heart, and a bright stimulus of zeal for his Father's glory came swallowing up all merely selfish aims, and nerveing with a heavenly courage to face hopefully his solitary life.

Like the lighthouse upon the rock, this peace shone amid the gloom: after the fierce waves had spent their fury, lashing themselves against the impenetrable sides, and flinging their misty sprays up into the wild confusion of the storm, forth came the friendly flash of the steady flame over all the dark waters around—clear in its distinctness, and safe in the sure guidance which its light gave.

It was at first very difficult for Edulf to recon-

cile the high principle of Constance with the strange, sad step she had taken ; and the shock of this surprise surpassed even his bewilderment at the blow it dealt to his own bright hopes. But, by and bye, some streaks of light flickered across the gloom, which helped him to account for its strangeness. His own singular simplicity, and transparency of character, both naturally and in his sanctified life, helped him to explain and excuse the step.

Mr. Marjoribanks, he mentally argued with himself, was no doubt a changed man. To be with her, was to be inspired with the wish, at least, to be like her.

The sordid clutch with which the old man had grasped the world and the world's treasures, had changed, no doubt, into a gentler hold upon its uncertain pleasures ; and perhaps he had grown young again under the influence of the delicious freshness and brightness of her pure spirit.

Of himself she had been forbidden to think, and he of her, and besides she had no word of his to bind her to him ; and even though the strong hope had filled him, that she was far

from indifferent to him and his devoted love, it had been all undeclared, and—she was free!

These apologetic musings, all exculpatory of *her*, came to his relief with a blessed calm. From desponding and every tinge of murmuring he kept himself, regarding it as sinful in itself, dishonouring to the Lord, and very hurtful to his own soul.

Yet there is perhaps nothing more difficult for the grown man—grown in mind as well as in body—to say, than, as in the inspired words, ‘I am poor and needy.’ It was no light matter in Edulf’s case to have been brought to this; yet could he now rejoice in saying it, coupled as it was with his simple trust in the assurance, ‘Yet the Lord thinketh on me.’

Yes, it is blessed to think that, whatever or whoever may be the cause of temptation to a believer, it has all passed before God ere it touches him, and has been so scrutinized and adjusted to his circumstances, his temperament, his weak faith, that it can work only for good. The sifting process which Edulf’s Christian principle got from all admixture with creature in-

fluence was good for his soul, and out of it he came refined and strong. There was something about him, however, either added or taken away as he revived and rose from beneath the blow which had struck him down. Something like the brightness of life was gone ; but something also of deep, single-eyed earnestness was brought into his spirit, which gave energy and intentness and purpose to his life. His usually bright face, too, wore an expression new and peculiar. A look of mingled pain and patience was there, as if some great loss had come to him, which, though bravely borne, had left traces of sorrowful regret behind.

Constance was never absent from his thoughts. Yet it was the memory as of a loved one dead ; and underneath the calm outside lay the un-stanch'd wounds, ever ready to break out afresh. *Her* place in his heart never could be filled ; and to a life of solitude he resigned himself. It was now, he felt, his part to live on, thinking as much of duty and as little of enjoyment as he could.

He had, since the unexpected discovery of the very ample fortune which his father had left

to his sister and himself, and before the blight had fallen on his earthly hopes, resolved to retire from foreign service, and endeavour to get employment at home. But now it mattered little,—rather he felt impelled to resume his roving life on the ocean; and but for the interest of his sister and her family, he would have bade, perhaps, a final adieu to his native land. But his heart yearned over these dear ones, and he longed to see them living for something higher than the passing trifles of the day.

Mrs. Waldegrave, who was delicate and amiably irresolute, loved and leant upon him with a strong sisterly pride. The Squire, too, reposed in the judgment and fearlessly expressed views of his brave brother-in-law; while Aimée worshipped, as she herself said, the ground he trode upon, and was more influenced than she chose to believe by Uncle Edulf's opinion on persons and things. He agreed, therefore, to prolong his visit, and 'to help with everything,' as Aimée expressed it.

In Aimée and her concerns he became greatly interested. He saw in her the germs of a fine

and generous character ; but the warm affection of her heart was overgrown and obscured by the selfishness which over-indulgence had propagated ; and the aims of her soul, which might have been made to aspire to something higher, were concentrated on her own all-important self. Exacting to the last degree, there was yet a dash of piquancy in her ways that disarmed criticism in many minds, and rendered her, when all went smooth, very charming ; while her surprise and defiance of all interference or control were often most amusing in their outburst. Like a little queen she reigned, and all were expected obediently to own her sway.

No one, Edulf could perceive, was more fascinated by Aimée than Mr. Drummond. His visit to the Rectory, which had already exceeded his usual moderate bounds, was still protracted ; and although professional engagements called him once and again to Edinburgh, he was always turning up at Thornfield in a puzzling fashion. Aimée, whose indifference to Vincent Durant was sufficiently marked to have daunted and discouraged the most ardent lover, was visibly

excited when in Mr. Drummond's company; and her anxiety to please him was very apparent to her uncle's watchful eye. She commenced reading Macaulay's *History of England*, and practising a long-despised sonata of Beethoven; and although the effort was sadly spasmodic, straw as it was, it indicated the direction of the current. Her visits to the Rectory were more frequent than ever; and no party of any kind at home was interesting unless Mr. Drummond was there. A passion for everything Scotch seized her; and a large thistle which grew in one part of the garden, and which hitherto had been voted an ugly weed, was now watered and tended in a manner so unbecoming its rugged constitution, that symptoms of premature decay set in.

Edulf, who knew what the disappointment to Aimée's parents would be if she married Mr. Drummond, and were settled so far from Thornfield, communicated his suspicions to Mrs. Waldegrave.

'Oh, nonsense, Edulf!' was the lady's reply. 'Trust me, Mr. Drummond is not the man to

attract Aimée. Why, he hates riding, and is daft, as the Scotch say, about antiquarian societies and golf. Besides, he is too old and quiet and ——'

'He is in the very prime of life, Franey.'

'Yes, yes; but Aimée is so young.'

'And he is a rising man in his profession,' continued Edulf; 'and, no doubt, will one day be on the bench.'

'Oh, he is every way most charming,' said Mrs. Waldegrave, 'but perfectly unlike and unsuited to Aimée. No, Vincent Durant is my choice. He is such a kind, good-hearted fellow. And Aimée would be so near us at Wickley; and he would give her everything her own way. Why, Edulf, we couldn't exist without Aimée near us.'

'Well, then, you should instantly try to keep her from being so much in Mr. Drummond's society; for it is perfectly plain, Frances, that they care for one another.'

'Oh, Edulf! you cannot, must not, say such dreadful things.'

'I would not were I not convinced of the truth of what I say. Where is Aimée now?'

‘She is—ah, well, to-day she is at the Rectory. But I shall see about it, and not allow her to go back again for a long time—at least if——’

‘You, my gentle sister, can prevent it; which you no more can, than you could turn the flowing tide.’

In the evening, as Mrs. Waldegrave sat alone in the drawing-room gazing out anxiously for Aimée, she saw two figures come slowly up the little private path. Her heart beat fast as her eye fell on Aimée and a gentleman with her. Before, however, she had time to recognise Aimée’s companion, she herself burst into the room, and, flinging herself upon her knees at her mother’s feet, she buried her face in her hands and murmured forth:

‘Oh, mamma, how happy I am! He has told me that he loves me.’

‘Who? Vincent?’

‘Mamma!’ she exclaimed as she raised her flushed face, over which passed a look of scorn. ‘Oh no, no—Mr. Drummond. He has told me so with his own lips to-night, and says he is so

very much surprised that I had not guessed it long ago.'

'Aimée! speak—you don't mean that you care for—that you would ever dream of him and his regiment of children! I never would consent to ——'

'Oh! but I have promised,' throwing back her pretty head, while a look of resolution settled on her face. 'And Mr. Drummond has gone now to speak to papa.'

Mrs. Waldegrave's distress was equalled only by her husband's blank amazement at the declaration which Mr. Drummond made to him of his love for Aimée; and if anything was wanted to complete his bewilderment, it was to hear from Aimée's own lips that Mr. Drummond was the man of her choice.

All the obstacles which, in her parents' eyes, looked so insurmountable, were arrayed before her mind,—the separation, the family, the certainty of vexation from that quarter, and the difficulties which such a connection would be sure to entail: all were laid gravely, yet most lovingly, before her.

But from each and all she turned impatiently away; and vowing that she would never care for any but Mr. Drummond,—that if the number of the children had been sixteen, instead of six, it would have been all the same,—that, in short, she should, and would, marry the hero of her heart, she peremptorily resisted and resented all further interference in the matter.

Mrs. Waldegrave pleaded for the respite of a year, during which the reality of her affection might be proved. But she scorned the implied doubtfulness of her love, and insisted that Mr. Drummond should be allowed to name and fix the time for the wedding to take place. He entreated that there should be no delay, urging his close business engagements when the Court of Session should again sit, and the wish of his own and Aimée's heart that there should be time, before the long vacation ended, for a Continental wedding tour.

As Edulf foresaw, Aimée carried it all her own way in this most momentous step, as in all other steps of her young life. She coaxed her mother out of much of her sober and anxious view

of the event, leading her into a partial and hazy belief that, after all, Aimée's captivation of such a clever and charming man was at least a triumph, and, by the flow of good-humour which her happiness made easy, she lulled the Squire's temporary anxieties to sleep. There was everything, he argued with himself, prosperous and suitable in Mr. Drummond's position to make him a fit enough match for Aimée. It was not to be expected she would stay in the old nest all her days; and all this fuss and agitation of his wife about the step-children was just part of the customary repugnance which he supposed all mothers had to parting with their daughters.

So the marriage preparations went on, and a day towards the middle of September was fixed on to crown the happiness of the young couple.



CHAPTER VII.

THE WEDDING.

'Where'er my footsteps turned,
Her voice was like a hidden bird that sang,
The thought of her was like a flash of light
Or an unseen companionship—a breath
Of fragrance independent of the wind.'

WORDSWORTH.

IN singular and touching contrast with Aimée's resistless sway and determined carrying out of her own will, not only in the all-important event of the wedding itself, but in the control of everything connected with that event, was the quiet and gentle demeanour of Mr. and Mrs. Waldegrave. All their parental remonstrances and objections having failed so much as to make her pause even in the step she was about to take, they ceased all warning and entreaty. No prediction

of disappointment in her voluntary lot was uttered, no threat of disinheritance, no exasperating sneer fell from their kind lips ; and if there was the absence of such warmth and heartiness as would have characterized a thorough satisfaction with the choice their child had made, there was the truest consideration and kindness in all their preparations and arrangements.

A most elaborate and elegant trousseau was furnished from Paris and London ; and costly presents flowed in upon the young bride.

Far advanced though the season was, Thornfield was still in great beauty ; the golden tinge on the trees and ferns adding only its own variegated charm to the landscape.

It was the night before the wedding.

Every preparation was made, from the packing of the bride's box to the prospective adjustment of the guests in the ceremony of the morrow. The visitors had all arrived, and a lull in the bustle of the exciting day had come. Mr. Drummond and Aimée were no one knew where, Mrs. Waldegrave and kind little Merry Carew were superintending some final decorations in the hall,

a detachment of croquet devotees were in the heat of a keenly contested game, and our old friend Miss Witherington, who had returned to Thornfield for the wedding, full of new and almost desperate projects to captivate the invulnerable Captain Ellicombe, was standing listlessly by the piano in the drawing-room, turning over the pages of an old music-book, in the vain hope that Edulf would ask her to sing.

He, meanwhile, seemed riveted by the contents of the *Times*, which he held in his hand.

‘Ah!’ he exclaimed at last, ‘can it really be he?’ Then seeing Miss Witherington, he apologized for his abruptness, by saying he had just read a paragraph in the newspaper which gave a glimmer of hope that a very dear friend of his, supposed to have been drowned, might be still alive.

‘How curious!’ languidly. ‘Well, some people do turn up in a queer way. Have you been very musical since I was here, Captain Ellicombe?’

‘Tolerably so.’

'How dreadful it must be to have no ear! Merry Carew, for instance.'

'Very,' in an absent tone.

'Should you like to hear my last new song?'

'Thank you.'

And, with wonderful alacrity, the young lady seated herself at the piano, and very soon threw Edulf into a condition bordering on frenzy, by the manner of her rendering a plaintive Italian air, for which, in an unguarded moment, he had expressed a preference.

'Signor Fricallanza says I do that really well,' she said, with affected modesty, as she rose from the piano; 'but what do *you* think?' looking towards Edulf, who felt considerably nonplussed.

'*I* think? Well, after Signor Fricallanza's verdict, you must care very little indeed what any one else can say or think.'

'Oh! but I *do* care for *your* opinion, Captain Ellicombe; and not in singing only,' she added in a would-be confidential tone. 'I am so glad to come back to Thornfield; I have just moped since I have been away. What have

you been doing all this long time, Captain Ellicombe?’

‘Not very much, I fear,’ answered Edulf.

‘How happy Aimée looks; and what a handsome man Mr. Drummond is!’ she continued.

‘Strange, strange,’ glancing abstractedly at the *Times*.

‘What?’

‘The weather. Oh! I beg your pardon.’

‘Whose wedding will come next?’ said Miss Witherington, adjusting her eye-glass.

‘Who can tell?’ Then starting up, as Mrs. Waldegrave entered the room, Edulf exclaimed eagerly, ‘Franez, there is a hope that my old friend Clyne Raynall is alive—among the savages! Captain Willoughby of the *Magnet*, writing to the *Times*, says, that when off the shores of Patagonia, one of his crew picked up a singular piece of wood, on the smooth part of which were traced words written evidently with a nail, or some such rude implement. The words were scarcely legible, the signature Clyne R. being all that could be clearly deciphered. Captain Willoughby believes that the bit of wood must have been cast into the

stream flowing into the bay by some wandering or captive Englishman, detained perhaps far in the interior, a prisoner in the hands of native tribes, from whom he is unable to escape. He has doubtless taken this not very hopeful means of endeavouring to make known to his friends the fact of his existence. Captain Willoughby suggests, of course, his friends raising an expedition to release him. By strategy or bargain it will have to be accomplished, for these natives are numerous and very savage. I always thought Clyne would turn up. Brave fellow! he has been wonderfully preserved.'

'No one, surely, would venture among these dreadful savages,' said Miss Witherington, with elevated eyebrows.

'Not to rescue a noble fellow from imprisonment and banishment, and possibly some day a capriciously cruel death!' exclaimed Edulf. 'It would be some good service to have done in one's life, to give back to society and to his friends such a man.'

'Captain Willoughby is a friend of the Durants,' said Mrs. Waldegrave. 'Vincent,—

and she uttered the name sadly,—‘Vincent talks a great deal about him.’

‘Ah!’ exclaimed Edulf brightly; ‘then I shall hear about him to-morrow.’

‘He is not coming,’ answered Mrs. Waldegrave quite mournfully.

‘What?’

‘No; he is suffering from—I forget what he says in his note—but he can’t come. He has sent Aimée the most superb bracelet. It is so characteristic, too, consisting of exquisitely finished medallion photographs, set in gold. The photos are of Gold-dust and Tip and Terry, and a lovely view of Thornfield. It is a most charming gift, poor fellow!’

‘I hope he is not ill,’ said Edulf. Then taking out his watch, he added, ‘I have time to walk over to Wickley, if you ladies will kindly excuse me. You will know where I am, Franey, should I be late.’

The next moment Edulf was straight on his way to Wickley Manor.

The road lay through a romantic glen, at the remote end of which the high road to

Wickley was reached. A beautiful knoll rose out of the thickest part of the tangled wood, from the top of which the view of the house was fine. A pretty rustic bower was planted there; and the intervening trees were dwarfed, to admit of an unobstructed view.

Eduf sprang out of his way, for a moment, to catch a passing glance of the charming scene.

‘Hollo, Vincent!’ he exclaimed as the lank figure of young Durant fell upon his gaze. He was sitting in the arbour, his head bent between his hands; and, as at the sound of footsteps he started, Eduf was shocked to see him so haggard and pale.

‘What’s up, old fellow?’ he added kindly.

‘Oh, Captain Ellicombe, it’s you. Your step was so light, it might have been *hers*. But no, she never seeks for ferns and mosses in the glen now. And besides — to-morrow is her wedding-day;’ and the last words were groaned rather than spoken.

‘Come, come,’ said Eduf in a rallying tone, ‘you mustn’t lose heart,

“Nor die, because a woman’s fair.”

There are as good fish *in* the sea as have ever come out.'

Vincent had risen to meet Edulf, and they strolled along the soft smooth grass, Edulf's manly heart being profoundly touched by the visible grief on Vincent's face. He had imbibed a strong liking for the young man, and saw, beneath a certain *gaucherie* and dulness of manner, the real worth and simplicity of character which belonged to Vincent. He knew how ardent his love for Aimée had been; but as he had been little at Thornfield since her engagement was announced, he had conceived no adequate idea of the depth and devotion of that love.

'I was just coming to see you,' he said, 'and am glad I have not missed you.'

'I am very glad. I thought no one would be about to-night; and I have been watching a long, long time.'

'Watching—what?'

'For just one last look of *her* before to-morrow,' he faltered out. 'But she has never come out.'

Eduf did not speak ; he repented of his rallying tone and words a moment ago.

‘You will think me an absolute fool,’ Vincent went on ; ‘but my life has been an utter blank these few past days. For *she* has been all and everything to me ever since I can remember ; and now my life seems all dried up, and I feel like a petrification, or as if I were walking in a dream.’

His distress was painful to behold ; and Eduf felt what a wealth of affection Aimée had put from her.

‘I couldn’t have believed a fellow *could* have had to bear so much,’ Vincent said again, after an embarrassed pause. ‘But I care for nothing now—not a thing—but my two good parents. Ah ! and Hector, poor fellow,’ as he bent over his shaggy pet, who licked his hand most lovingly. ‘But it’s all my awkwardness and—my large hands,’ he added, looking down reproachfully on his respectable brown palms, at which Aimée sneered so much. ‘My everything is lost to me for ever.’

‘Everything !’ said Eduf ; ‘that’s saying much—too much, surely.’

‘Oh, it’s not saying one quarter of the truth. I don’t care now if I die to-night straight off, as they say over the way. I should really prefer it indeed to living on like this. What’s the use of living just to be miserable?’

‘What’s the use, indeed, when you are intended to be happy?’

Vincent looked round inquiringly. ‘How can you make that out?’

‘Because, whatever earthly blessing it may please God to give or to withhold, He is still offering to us Himself and His great love; and no one is at liberty to count himself miserable with such an offered gift.’

‘Oh, Captain Ellicombe, it’s easy, easy to speak; but you know nothing of the wound from which I am suffering. Could you imagine yourself in a fire like mine, it would burn *you* too.’

‘Vincent, I have been in such a fire.’

‘You?’ excitedly. ‘Impossible! But how did you ever get out of it?’

‘Ah! that’s a story that goes deeper than perhaps you have ever thought of, my good fellow.

I daresay you'll not believe me, but I thank God for my sorrow.'

'Thank God! My feelings are very different.'

'Ah! that's because you have not come to think.'

'Think! I'm just dying off my feet thinking.'

'Ah! but you must let higher and better thoughts come in.'

'You puzzle me, fairly puzzle me, Captain Ellicombe. I can't make you out. Come and tell me, pray.'

They sat down, and Edulf unfolded to his companion something of the great trial of his life, and of the source from which came his peace and strength. Very glad he was to observe that, as he talked, Vincent listened with absorbed attention, and his mind seemed somewhat led away from his own distracting thoughts.

'Well,' at last he said, 'I confess I have thought little of this, though I daresay God knows better what's good for me than I myself can do; but it *is* hard to bear,—all one's best affections disappointed and thrown back.'

'Ah! there it is; God wishes you to give

your best affections to Himself. *He knows* that the best and brightest things of earth are only for a day,—that they must soon leave us, or we them; and He would have us seek a portion which shall never fail. Yes; and in His condescending love and pity He seeks to fill our hearts, and to be Himself our endless joy.'

'But,' said Vincent, who had sat silently pondering over Edulf's words, 'did you not feel awfully cut up about it?'

He repented of his words when they were beyond recall; for, as he turned his wistful face towards his companion, an expression of such pain crossed that manly face, that it sent a cold shiver through Vincent's heart.

'Forgive me,' he stumbled out, awkwardly enough; 'but how can you say that all these sorrows and things come in love? It all seems to me sheer cruelty, and makes *me* the reverse of love God.'

'But,' answered Edulf firmly, though gently, 'God is love.' And the inspired words, so reverently spoken, so apart from all argument or detail, so unflinching, yet so encouraging, struck

a chord in Vincent's heart, and remained ever afterwards a shield against all the fiery darts which the arch-adversary hurled against him.

'He *is* love,' and Edulf sat silent again.

'Love!' muttered Vincent in the injured impulse of the moment,—'it may be so; but all this blight and misery *looks* very unlike it, somehow.'

'It looks to me,' said Edulf, gazing kindly and gravely into his friend's puzzled face,—'it looks to me very like as if God, by removing *this* thing, were making room in your heart for Himself.'

'Ah!' and an intelligent but faint smile broke over Vincent's face, 'but it's a dreadful way to do it.'

'No other way, perhaps, would have succeeded,' said Edulf in a tone the tenderness of which touched Vincent deeply; 'and it is better surely to fling all one's treasures out of a leaking ship, and have a chance of life, than to clutch them and die.'

'So it is. You have done me good, Captain Ellicombe,' said Vincent, grasping the hand so

kindly held out towards him. 'I feel a queer sort of hope here again,' pressing his hand upon his heart, 'which I never thought would be there again. Perhaps, after to-morrow's fairly past, I may get on better. It gives a different turn to the whole thing, looking at it in the way you have put it.'

'A quite different turn,' answered Edulf cheerfully, glad to have lodged even this thought in the depressed youth's heart; and wisely forbearing to say more on the subject just then, he added as he rose to go: 'I shall come over to Wickley to-morrow.'

'To-morrow!'

'Yes; we shan't know what to do with ourselves all the afternoon.'

'Could you really? It would be very kind.'

'All right. I want to speak to you about something in which I am greatly interested, and in which you can help me.'

'I?' with a look of pleased surprise.

'Yes; but it is too late to begin about it now. We shall talk it over leisurely to-morrow.'

And as the twilight stole on, and the stars

from their beautiful vault began to peep down upon the earth, the two friends parted. And Vincent Durant went his homeward way a more hopeful man on this, as he termed it, the eve of the execution of all his hopes, than, a couple of hours before, he could or would have believed possible.

The sanguine expectations of fine weather which a rosy sunset the night before had excited, were not disappointed, and the wedding morning was, as Aimée's nurse declared, 'as if made for her young lady and her happiness.'

Very lovely the young bride looked in her snowy robes and wreath; and a proud man Charles Drummond felt himself, to receive so fair a gift from the agitated Squire, who, as nurse again volubly remarked, 'looked more like a funeral than a wedding.' Mrs. Waldegrave, notwithstanding a strong priming of *sal volatile*, went off in a hysteric fit just as the bride's carriage drove up to take her to church; and the requisite delay to recover her from this very inopportune attack, caused a painful sensation among the assembled party in the church.

Aimée, whose tearless eye and pale cheeks were in remarkable contrast with the flush and agitation of both her parents, walked firmly up the aisle, followed by six bridesmaids, in a flutter of tulle and ribbons, and was received by her handsome bridegroom with a calm gravity, which was only, however, the outward control of a happy and exultant heart.

The pathway from the gate to the church door was strewn with flowers, scattered by a troop of happy little maidens; and the whole neighbourhood had turned out to do honour to the Squire's daughter, and to gratify, too, their own curiosity, by being spectators of so interesting an event.

A beautiful anthem was played as the bridal party entered the church; and in a few brief moments the sacred knot was tied, and the Rector pronounced the couple kneeling at the altar to be no longer twain, 'but one until death should them part.'

Then the 'wedding march' struck up, and, leaning on her husband's arm, Aimée, with a flush upon her cheek, and a lustrous sparkle in

her eye, passed through the silent but admiring crowd who thronged the church and path to catch a parting smile from the Squire's fair daughter. For it was more as the child of the kind genial Squire and his benevolent gentle wife that Aimée was thought of, than for any great interest which she excited personally among those in the midst of whom she had spent her life; and the admiration she called forth was more that inspired by a beautiful picture or classic piece of sculpture,

‘Fair to see, but cold to touch,’

than for any human qualities of loveliness which in their eyes, or from their experience of her influence, she possessed.

She was too self-absorbed on this day, as on all other days, to care for the pretty floral arch that spanned the church gate, or the flowers which so tastefully decorated the church, otherwise than as an expression, and a right and proper one, of loyal devotion to the young queen and bride of the day; and sorry would have been the entertainment provided for the tenantry and villagers, if no other heart or hands than

Aimée's had contrived and arranged the hospitable feast.

The luncheon over, she suffered herself to be attired in the pretty costume and hat prepared as her travelling dress, and to the last moment was occupied with orders to nurse about the destination of sundry boxes of finery. No kind, parting injunctions to Uncle Edulf or Merry Carew were given relative to the tender parents who were suffering so keenly at the coming separation from their idol. A hasty embrace to the two beings who loved her best on earth, a graceful farewell to the large company who were assembled in the hall,—and stepping lightly into the carriage, the prancing steeds of which seemed impatient of any further tedium of delay, she smilingly bowed her adieu to her childhood's happy home, and

'The kind friends dwelling there.'



CHAPTER VIII.

THE HOME-COMING.

'When the lamp is shattered,
The light in the dust lies dead ;
When the cloud is scattered,
The rainbow's glory is shed ;
When the lute is broken,
Sweet tones are remembered not ;
When the lips have spoken,
Loved accents are soon forgot.'

SHELLEY.

NOW, Master Harry, you've gone an' crumpled yir best collar a'ready, an' it's no' me that's gaun to set ye up wi' another ; so mind that, ye bad boy,' said Effie, the under-nurse of a gentleman's establishment in a certain house in Moray Place.

Effie found it no sinecure to keep watch in the play-room during any indispensable absence of nurse herself, and she inflicted upon the so-called young master a hearty pinch on the arm,

by way of practical comment upon her words. Harry, a sturdy little fellow of eight, panting to be emancipated from petticoat rule, and very jealous of every interference on the part of his young nurse, instantly doubled his small fist, and, threateningly rushing at his tormentor, aimed a blow at her face. By a dexterous evasion, she saved herself from experiencing the full pith of Master Harry's arm, and, seizing him by the collar, she pushed him before her into the inner nursery, and, deliberately turning the key, left him to bawl and bang to his heart's content; then snatching up little Kitty, who lay peaceably crowing in her white crib, with her blue eyes looking upwards, smiling to some invisible pleasant thing, she commenced a hasty and, it must be confessed, a very ungentle arrangement of the little girl's pretty flaxen curls. A sudden pull of a tangled lock caused Kitty to set up a wild scream, in the midst of which Bruce and Ian, two rollicking schoolboys, tumbled into the room, vociferating, 'Aunt Bridget is coming to see if you're all ready; for it's close upon the time for them coming now.'

'What is all this noise?' said the calm but evidently provoked voice of Miss Bridget Drummond, as amid Kitty's screams and Harry's kicks, and the loud enunciation by the two elder boys of her own orders, she sailed into the room.

'She'th pullin' all my hair out,' said Kitty pettishly, breaking from the scared Effie's helpless hands and rushing towards her aunt. 'An' she'th been thlappin' an' pinthin' poo' Harry. He'th in there,' pointing, with a finger in her mouth and the tear in her eye, to the door, against which at this moment a perfect battery of blows was levelled afresh.

'Where is nurse?' asked Miss Drummond, looking round on the scene of anarchy.

'Here, ma'am,' said the worthy woman, who hastily entered the room. 'I've been down-stairs doin' up Miss Kitty's white dress, which,' looking askance at Effie, 'was spoilt somehow in the ironing, but we'll soon be ready, ma'am;' and, quietly taking Kitty on her knee, she gently smoothed the curls on the small, pretty head, and adjusted a blue ribbon tastefully among them. She next

proceeded to invest her little pet with the prettiest, whitest frock which any pair of hands could have produced.

'There!' she at last exclaimed as, having in an incredibly short time completed Kitty's dressing, she set the sweet child on her own little legs; and, satisfying herself with a single glance at the 'bonnie little thing,' she next turned her attention to Harry, whom Bruce had liberated, and who was only restrained by his very wholesome respect for nurse's presence from straightway renewing his attack upon Effie.

A second collar was indispensable, and a smart scrubbing of face and hands; the final touches to the entire little party—Bruce and Ian included—being only just completed when Elsie called upstairs, 'Come down, everybody; the carriage is at the door.'

'Ye'll catch it noo,' muttered Effie to Harry, with an irritating twinkle in her mischievous eye, as he trotted away with the rest.

'What d'ye mean, you?' said Harry angrily.

'Yir step-maw'll keep ye in tight good order; that she will,' continued Effie in an under, gig-

gling tone ; while poor Harry, compelled to follow down-stairs, could only cast threatening gestures behind him.

There was stir and bustle in the well-lighted hall as Mr. Drummond handed Aimée into her new Scotch home, and by a warm pressure on her little hand conveyed to her the welcome which the presence of so many prevented him from uttering aloud. His face lighted up with pleasure as he caught sight of Bruce and Ian, whom Aunt Bridget, on her own responsibility, had fetched for a week's holiday from school. A couple of finer boys could nowhere be seen than these two brothers, with their dark, handsome faces and manly little figures, their faces radiant with intelligence, and possessed of far more natural courtesy of manner than often falls to the lot of blunt, bluff schoolboys.

In an instant they sprang forward to meet their father, of whom they were devotedly fond and proud, and to receive the girl-wife, who leant upon his arm.

'Ah! Bruce and Ian,' said Mr. Drummond, shaking them each cordially by the hand.

'Aimée—the two boys,' as he turned to introduce them to their stepmother.

'What great fellows!' she said in a tone in which traces of surprise, if not of dismay, might be detected, and she coldly touched their eager hands.

'Ah, Bridget, this is kind indeed! I did not expect that you could have left home at this chill season, even to give *us* a welcome;' and a hasty introduction passed between Miss Drummond and Aimée, as Mr. Drummond turned from one child to another, and finally mounted the stairs with Kitty on his back, the happy child screaming with delight, and prattling out all sorts of endearing words to her 'own dea' papa.'

'Where is Margaret?' asked Mr. Drummond as he entered the drawing-room and waited at the door for Aimée.

'Here, papa;' and his eldest daughter, a very distinguished but extremely proud-looking girl, rose from a sofa, where she had resolutely remained, and advanced to meet her father.

At last Aimée was made to comprehend who all this regiment of people and children was; and after the most indifferent glance at them all, and

the coldest possible recognition of each—Elsie alone excepted—she asked to be shown to her rooms.

‘Rooms indeed!’ exclaimed Margaret, resuming her sofa and her book. ‘How many does she expect or want, I should like to know?’

‘She has a whole suite at Thornfield,’ said Elsie, who had done her best to propitiate those at home in favour of ‘Aimée, step-mamma.’ But while she still exerted herself kindly on the young stranger’s behalf, and the boys declared she was a ‘tearing brick, in looks at least,’ Margaret turned a deaf ear to the voluble criticisms which fell fast from the eager tongues around her, and Miss Bridget looked very much surprised and discomposed.

‘An utter child!’ was her unexpressed remark; ‘and a cold, selfish-looking one too.’

Aimée came down to the drawing-room refreshed with her toilet, but full of fault-finding. Her rooms were absurdly high up. She should be afraid of fire and robbers, and what not; and the cold was something dreadful on the passages and stairs.

'Is the house properly heated with hot-water pipes?' she inquired.

'No; papa doesn't think it's healthy to have hot pipes,' said Elsie, who could not persuade Margaret to be kind and civil to her father's bride, against whom she had taken up a cruel prejudice.

'Oh! but it must be done immediately,' said Aimée decidedly. 'I couldn't exist in such fearful cold.'

'What's that, Aimée?' said Mr. Drummond, coming cheerily into the room. 'Wait till the frost comes next month, and we'll have you skating on Duddingston Loch, and revelling in our Scotch cold;' and, without waiting for any reply, he offered his wife his arm, and nodding to Bruce to do the civil to Aunt Bridget, he led the way to the dining-room, followed by all the party except Harry and little Kitty.

'Pa never thaid good night,' said the child poutingly, as she found herself once more in Effie's unmerciful hands; 'and Aimée, thep-ma, never kithed me.'

'Kiss ye!' exclaimed Effie, as she held Kitty's

little pink feet before the cosy fire ; 'an' never wull. I believe she hates ye frae the bottom of her heart,—if she *hae* a heart, that's to say.'

'Nurth kith Kitty,' lisped the child, as, with a large tear in each blue eye, she held out her arms to the faithful woman, who, having left Harry safe and sound in his crib, hastened to soothe her darling's wounded feelings.

'Effie,' said nurse very sternly, 'I heard you ; and you're *never* to say such things to the children. Do you hear ? How often I've tried to drum this into you ! It's very wrong and wicked. Do you understand me ?'

'But she said it herself, dear me,' said Effie, in the formation of whose head the organ of veneration seemed an entire hollow. 'The bairn said it her own blessed self—humph !' pitching Kitty into nurse's arms, and flouncing through the room. 'It's very unfaur to blame *me* for think I have nothing to do with.'

But nurse was too sharp and quick-witted to be beguiled by any such plausible dodges on the part of Effie ; and when Kitty was soon fast asleep, she read Effie a sound good lec-

ture on the subject of the 'new mistress,' and of the relative duties which, as children and servants, they one and all owed to her.

Effie listened with open mouth and eyes, and nurse hoped much from the quiet attention with which her injunctions were listened to. Gradually, however, the fire and the rather lugubriously solemn tone of nurse's voice operated soporifically upon her auditor, and Effie buried her face in her hands, to hide, as the good woman hoped, the impression which her words were causing. Nurse was, however, on a sudden painfully undeceived by unequivocal sounds from the too quiet figure before her, and discovered, to her chagrin, that Effie was unconsciously happy in the land of nod.

Aimée took her seat at the head of her husband's well-appointed table with as much ease and grace as if she had sat there all her life. Mr. Drummond was all kindness and attention to her, and to each member of his family. He asked questions of Miss Bridget about her home, which was a cottage on his Highland estate; and Aimée listened with horror as Miss Bridget

quietly informed her brother that, in consideration of his children, who would of course be left a good deal to themselves during the gaities which would follow his wedding, she had shut up the cottage, and was free to pay him a long winter visit. The announcement, it must be confessed, fell as a clap on Mr. Drummond himself, who, tenderly attached as he was to his sister,—appreciating too, as he did, the real self-sacrifice which he knew it always cost her to leave the quiet of her own home,—felt nevertheless embarrassed at the idea of a prolonged visit, unpleasant as he could not help fearing it would be to his young wife. Having made some sort of acknowledgment of her announcement, he turned to Margaret, and playfully asked her to give an account of herself during the past weeks. Margaret, who was her father's image in person and manners, and who strongly resembled him besides in his high literary tastes and love of music; whose idolatry of her father was the ruling passion of her life, and whose pride was wounded to the last degree by his 'uncalled-for and quite unnecessary mar-

riage,' sparkled at his notice of her, and entered into an animated conversation on the subject of ethnology, which she was diligently studying at school. The party listened with interest, and questions were asked by Elsie and the boys, which Margaret, no less than Mr. Drummond, was quite able to answer. Aimée sat silent and solitary in heart. The pride which she experienced in listening to her husband's learned talk in other circles, gave place on this occasion to the most angry and envious feelings of the girl—his child too—who could so interest and absorb him, that he seemed altogether to forget *her* presence.

In vain did Miss Bridget try to conciliate the newly-installed mistress; in vain did poor Elsie endeavour to draw her out to speak of Thornfield. Silent, and with flushed cheeks and flashing eyes, she sat,—till, just as the butler quitted the room, she rose, and, with no effort to control or conceal her indignation, pushed back her chair, and, sweeping past her husband, exclaimed, 'You don't seem to need or care for *my* company, so I shall leave you all to yourselves!'

Elsie sprang to clasp and coax her back, and Mr. Drummond, recovering from his momentary surprise, started to retain the slight yet most dignified figure; but Aimée, gliding out of the room, flew up-stairs, and rested not till she found herself alone in her own apartment.

She leant her throbbing head upon the marble mantel-piece, and, pressing her hands over her burning cheeks, exclaimed aloud, 'How could Charles have all these people here to-night! What a horrid home-coming, to be sure!' So soliloquizing, she stood moody and cross, one train of mortifying thought succeeding another, till at last she started and violently rang the bell.

In answer to the summons, a nice-looking girl speedily made her appearance before her new mistress. Aimée, who was unfastening her dressing-case, said, just glancing in the direction where Ann respectfully stood, 'Send Harriet. I don't want you.'

Ann hesitated, and then said, 'Please, ma'am, Harriet has just gone out for a little. She thought you wouldn't be up-stairs for some time

yet, ma'am, and that she would have everything ready before you should leave the drawing-room.'

'She had no business to think on the subject,' said Aimée, much annoyed, for the solitude was very irritating. 'Put my boxes in there,' pointing to the dressing-room, 'and send for her instantly, wherever she is.'

Ann obeyed, and then quietly left the room. Presently, however, she returned with a message from Miss Bridget, offering to come, if she pleased, to see her, or to send her some tea, or anything else she might choose.

'I choose nothing but to be left alone, and not be any more bothered with people and things,' said Aimée, stung by this coolly permitted exile on the part of her husband, who she expected would have hastened to soothe and comfort her long ere this.

Ann injudiciously delivered the substance of this message to Miss Bridget at the tea-table. Instinctively one and all of the little party glanced at Mr. Drummond, who, uneasily endeavouring to keep up a conversation with his

children, and to hide the wounded feelings which this unexpected outburst on the part of Aimée had called forth, now hastened from the room ; and with a shade over his face, which he contrived to dispel as he ran up-stairs, took his way to Aimée's boudoir. He found her in her room, with her hair streaming loosely round her, plunging into the heart of a huge box for some suddenly recollected treasure—too impatient to wait for Harriet's return.

'Aimée,' said Mr. Drummond gently and in a tone of surprise, as he closed the door behind him, 'I have been hoping to see you in the drawing-room. Why are *you* taking all this trouble?'

Aimée, whose deep, true love for her husband was the greenest spot in her heart, felt all the inclination to throw herself into his arms, and weep out her angry disappointment on his kind breast ; but wounded pride restrained her, and she replied in a tone which had never grated on his ear before: '*I* come among all these strangers! You should have told me what a host of people would be meeting us on the night of my—'

and pausing, she presently added with increased irritation, 'my horrid home-coming.'

'People—what people?' asked Mr. Drummond gravely.

'All these rough, staring boys, and that prim body Bridget too, and ——'

'Hush, Aimée,' said her husband. 'You must not speak so.'

'Mustn't I?' she exclaimed, while a mischievous light flashed in her eye. 'Who dares say *must* to me?'

'Aimée,' said her husband, 'you are tired with our long journey to-day; you must not worry unpacking these boxes any more, but go to rest as fast as possible. Only, take one peep here with me;' and drawing her to his arms, he opened the boudoir door, where she had not yet been, and led her in.

'Home!' she exclaimed eagerly, as her surprised gaze fell upon the elegant room.

'Yes, darling; home—your home—our home,' and he laid her head—oh, so tenderly—on his breast.

She glanced up into his face, and then round

the room, and the words 'How kind—how very, very kind!' fell from her lips, for this charming apartment was the fac-simile of her own little lovely Thornfield *sanctum*. The furniture and draperies were all the same; and the innumerable *recherché* things with which her indulgent parents had adorned the room, were all reproduced by the kind hand which had planned the pleasant surprise.

Mr. Drummond watched his wife's eager delight with thankful pleasure. 'And look here!' he said, as, having scrutinized and inspected cabinet and drawer, she suffered herself to be led into the pretty recess. He raised a green gauze curtain, which concealed a cabinet picture, and there sat Mrs. Waldegrave smiling down upon her child. So truthful and charming was the portrait, that Aimée stood breathlessly looking up into the dear, kind face, as if expecting to hear her mother's voice.

'And papa too!' said Aimée, as the Squire's kind, hearty countenance was next displayed. 'Oh, Charles, what a pleasure you have given me! When did you get all this done? We

must leave the door open, that I may see their faces always, the last thing and the first every night and day.'

The clouds were all gone and—on Aimée's side at least—forgotten in the present sunshine of the hour; and very soon she was wandering in dreamland, amid crowds of strange people—pushed by boys, and rescued by Charles; while over and through all discomfort and distraction rose the forms of her parents, smiling on her head, and sheltering her from every chill breath that blew.

Next morning she descended to the library, refreshed and radiant. The summons to prayers had long since sounded; and she was too late for the simple but impressive service with which her husband inaugurated and closed, with his assembled household, each new day. Without a word of apology she politely greeted each member of the family, and soon breakfast was announced in the dining-room. She presided gracefully over the tea equipage—feeling it, however, extremely troublesome and tiresome to have so much to do in attending to the

wants of so many. Mr. Drummond meanwhile was immersed in the morning papers, and none of his family seemed to think of interrupting him.

‘Charles, do lay your paper down,’ said Aimée at last, as with quite a martyr air she handed to him the last remaining cup.

He playfully obeyed, and smilingly told the party that his wife was the best tea-maker he knew.

‘Now give us some of *your* good things,’ she exclaimed, as in an abstracted sort of way he again seized the paper.

‘Allow me,’ said Bruce as he proceeded to relieve his papa.

‘No, indeed; you’re not to be so selfish, Charles. Do, for pity’s sake, put that paper down and attend—to—me!’

He resolutely laid the paper aside, and, as if suddenly remembering that his attention was necessary for the smooth rolling of the domestic wheels, he talked, and devoted himself entirely to the breakfast-party.

‘Half an hour earlier to-morrow morning will

give me the papers besides,' he mentally argued with himself as, rising from breakfast, he said, looking at his watch, 'I am late. To-morrow, however, we shall be all right—eh, love?' looking towards Aimée as she followed him into his business-room.

'Indeed I'm not going to get up in the dark, Charles. It strikes me, too, it'll be a long enough day now, without getting up so frantically early as you do. When are those boys going back to school? And,' looking quite alarmed, 'is Bridget to be in the drawing-room when I am receiving our visitors?'

'Oh! there won't be many to-day,' said her husband encouragingly; 'and to-morrow's Saturday, when I'm less engaged; and Monday there's no court, so I shall see after you; and you can take a long drive this afternoon, if you order the carriage in good time. Bridget or Margaret will be happy to accompany you.'

'I'd rather have a ride, by far, all by myself. I'm going to see Gold-dust. Where are the stables?'

'Aimée,' said her husband, turning back from

the hall door, 'I must entreat you not to ride without me,—to begin with, at least,' he added, as he saw the rising colour in her cheeks. 'I should be miserable were you to mount Gold-dust when I am away. After his long holiday he will be more than ever excitable, and all the roads are strange to you.'

'So much the better. I *must* ride him to-day, Charles. I am panting to feel myself in the saddle again.'

'I'm late already,' said poor Mr. Drummond, who plumed himself on his punctuality, 'and must go. But I again beg you not to ride to-day. To-morrow we shall go together.'

'To-day I shall go alone,' she said playfully, as she watched him walk away.

Reluctantly he went; but business engagements in the Parliament House prevented all further discussion on the subject; and in his vexation he scarcely knew whether to chide or smile at the quite immoveable pertinacity with which his wife ever kept and took her own wilful way.

Within half an hour Gold-dust was at the

door, and Aimée—having very ungraciously declined Bruce's courteous offer to accompany her on his pony, and having also summarily dispensed with the groom's attendance—set forth quietly and alone on her first Edinburgh ride.

She looked very girlish and very elegant in her handsome riding-habit, and Gold-dust seemed consciously proud to have again his fair burden upon his back.

Ignorant alike of the different suburbs of the city, and of the respective attractions of scenery which each possessed,—indifferent, too, in which direction she went, provided she could get away into the fresh country air, Aimée speedily found herself on the Dean Bridge, and, following the wide, smooth road as it led her away in the Queensferry direction, soon she was lost to everything except her favourite, charming exercise; and a brisk canter sent the colour into her cheeks, and a fine glow over her spirits. After a long rambling ride she turned her horse's head, and reached home only to find that every one had had luncheon and was gone out.

'That's one blessing at any rate,' she thought

as she hastened to her room to dress. 'I shall have time to write mamma a budget in peace and quietness.'

She had just seated herself at her davenport in the drawing-room, when visitors were announced, and for the next two hours she had a rapid succession to entertain. Many of them were relations and intimate friends of the Drummonds, who, hearing the young couple had arrived, hastened to pay their congratulatory visits.

Aimée was pleased with the appearance of her guests, who belonged to the first class of Edinburgh society, and whose appreciation of her husband gratified her much. She appeared in charming spirits, and the visitors quitted the house greatly prepossessed in favour of 'the new Mrs. Drummond.'

Left alone at last in the drawing-room, Aimée had leisure to survey the handsome suite of rooms, the general air and furnishing of which were in perfect harmony with her own good taste. She was just beginning to long for her husband's return, when the door opened and Charles appeared. She sprang forward to meet

him, and he was pleased to see the bright look she wore.

‘Well! and how has the day passed with you, Aimée, love?’ he exclaimed. ‘But indeed I need not ask: your looks answer for you. Have the children pleased you?’ he continued. ‘I am sure they have. And nurse would have everything in order for your promised visit to the nursery. The little folks did not tease you too much, I hope?’

‘Oh!’ said Aimée impatiently, ‘I forgot all about them;’ and taking out her watch, ‘It is too late now to go.’

A shadow flitted over her husband’s face. Had she never thought of his children—not once?

‘You know, Charles,’ she said without waiting for his reply, ‘I can *not* be bothered with children. And Harry’s hair is so red, and Kitty is *such* a babyish thing, that really they’re no amusement to me—not a bit. Besides,’ she rattled on, ‘I’ve had no time. I’ve had no end of visitors,’ and she coaxingly wiled her husband to think and talk of them.

‘Ah! you would like the Forsyths,’ said

Charles as she ran over the names of her visitors; 'and Mrs. Dundas is a charming creature.'

'Delicious! and her daughter Flora is so handsome and clever-looking. I've taken quite a fancy to her; and she has promised to ride with me some day, but she has no riding-horse of her own. How shabby of her father, Charles!'

'No. He has a large family, and, although getting on famously at the bar, he is by no means wealthy.'

'Well, he might give her a horse, any way.'

'And would if she wished it, I am sure. But she is——'

'Oh, well! she says there are very tolerable creatures to hire, and that she sometimes has a ride in that way.'

At this moment the dressing-bell rang, and Aimée ran off to her room, saying, in a somewhat petulant tone, 'I am coming to sit with you in your study after dinner, Charles. Elsie says you go there always in the evening.'

At dinner Mr. Drummond studiously kept Aimée talking and amused, having in his mind's

eye the gloomy retrospect of the previous evening. She recounted with great vivacity the events of her morning's ride, animadverting severely on the familiar manners of the Scotch commonalty, to one or two of whom she had applied for information as to her route.

'It is not the fashion or custom for ladies to ride alone here,' said Margaret, whose sense of propriety had been quite outraged by Aimée's obstinacy in dispensing with Ronald's attendance.

'What do you know of my ride?' asked Aimée, turning sharply to Margaret, who certainly had no vocation to interfere with her remarks on the subject.

'Oh, Elsie and I were at school, of course; and Miss Hawkes saw you ride past, and we all ran to the window.'

'I know nothing of Miss Hawkes, I'm sure.'

'Nor did she know you. She's one of our governesses, and was attracted by seeing a lady on horseback alone. And then we saw it was you.'

'But she said how beautifully you sat,' inter-

posed Elsie, blushing, 'and that we should copy your fine carriage.'

Mr. Drummond looked gratefully at his little girl, and the rest of the dinner passed off pleasantly enough.

'I said I would come and sit with you, Charles,' said Aimée, as she glided in upon her husband before he had time to close the door of his private business-room.

He hesitated for a moment, and then said kindly, 'You must sit very still, then, Aimée; for look here,'—lifting from among piles of papers on his table a bundle tied with red tape,—'I have all these to read and think over to-night before ten o'clock, when Menteth and Murray come for a meeting of counsel.'

'Well, you must amuse and talk to me for a little bit first,' said Aimée, poking up the bright fire, and seating herself comfortably in a low chair.

Poor Mr. Drummond was puzzled and at a loss. He sat down beside his wife and chatted cheerfully away, bringing the pretty dimples into

her cheeks, which he loved so much to see, and yielding himself to the fascination of her playful ways. But ten minutes passed away, and other ten and more, until, glancing at the timepiece, he started, saying, 'Aimée, I must work : go to the drawing-room, love, and don't wait tea for me ;' and gently, but almost desperately, he led her to the door. In a moment smiles and dimples had given place to frowns, and with a grand toss and flounce she suffered the door to be closed upon her.

Far on into the night did Charles Drummond sit, diligently working at the intricate cases which were entrusted to his clear head and persevering habits ; and when at last he stopped, he found he had left himself but a brief respite for sleep and rest, till again at his early morning hour he should resume his severe and arduous mental toil.

'I shall just go on telling mamma everything,' said Aimée to herself one morning a few weeks after her arrival in Edinburgh, as she seated herself to write to Mrs. Waldegrave. 'Oh

me! oh me! what a different life this is from what I looked forward to!

‘Papa,’ she began, ‘says I write short, scrappy notes; so, as it is a pouring wet day, I shall send you a long, long epistle. Now picture my life here! I shall sketch a day for you:— Between five and six Charles gets up; a fire is laid over-night in his business-room, and he lights it himself, and I believe cooks coffee over it; then he begins his work. I should tell you, however, that he has a bath in his dressing-room, and makes the most frantic row with dumb-bells and things, which of course I hear, and can’t sleep. I am seldom or never down to prayers; and if I don’t make the greatest haste, Charles would be gone for the day, so I manage to scramble down to breakfast. But these horrid newspapers! He *will* read them; and I have to talk to Bridget or Margaret. Elsie goes early to school, and the boys, mercifully, are long since back to Eagle-mount. Then I try to get away out for a ride by myself, but it isn’t always easy; and of

course all my pleasure is gone, as you know, if any appendage comes with me. Then visitors begin; and almost every evening we are out at dinner, or Charles has some legal mag-nates here, after which he shuts himself into his room till every hour of the night. I don't care for Bridget—she is a great deal older than Charles; indeed she was like a mother to him when their parents died, and he is very grate-ful, and all that sort of thing. But it is horrid having her here, and she is to stay over Christ-mas now. Fancy! Margaret is at school all day, and in the evening screams away at her singing in the schoolroom up-stairs, or reads in the drawing-room. I greatly prefer the singing up-stairs. As for the boys, I like Bruce, who is really attentive and nice. Ian is fearfully wild, and I call it impudent; but Elsie says it is just his high spirits. Elsie you know, and, I think, like: she isn't quite so nice as I thought her at the Rectory; but nice too, though very sly and unstylish. Harry's hair is the colour of the last orange jelly cook at home made, and Kitty is a pretty lisping baby.

‘The people and the parties are what I like best here, Gold-dust and my rides, of course, excepted. There are some very nice families, and I have quite fallen in love with Miss Dundas. Flora Dundas is her name. Her mother seems to think her quite a *nonpareil*. I went once or twice into the nursery, but Kitty always cried when I appeared, and Harry skulked out of the room. It was no good, so I have given it up. The boys come home soon now for Christmas, and two Indian nieces of Charles’s (Gertrude Airey’s children) are invited to spend their holidays here. If I run off from the whole concern and appear at Thornfield some fine day, won’t you be glad to see me? My love to Uncle Edulf when you write to him. I hope he will contrive to fish up his drowned friend, after all the trouble he has taken. I wish I could have gone with him, with all my heart and soul.

‘I am so angry that you and papa won’t come and spend Christmas with us. It isn’t a bit too soon to visit us, and I had set my heart upon it.

'We had a very good run one day over a famous country for jumps. Gold-dust carried me like a bird, and never refused. The brush, with which I could very well have dispensed, was attached to my saddle.

'A kiss to papa and your dear self, from
your ever-loving AIMEE.

'P. S.—Charles is very, very clever, and fearfully admired and looked up to by the big wigs here. Everybody tells me I may be proud of my husband; and so I am, if—if he would only stay more with—*me*, and be more attentive to—*me*.'





CHAPTER IX.

THE YOUNG STEPMOTHER.

'The little rift within the lute,
That by and by will make the music mute,
And ever widening, slowly silence all.

'The little rift within the lover's lute,
Or little pitted speck in garner'd fruit,
That rotting inwards, slowly moulders all.'

TENNYSON.



CHRISTMAS this year was a very bright and fine season, and the ice on Duddingston Loch and the neighbouring ponds had never been in finer condition. The young Drummonds were enthusiastic skaters, and Miss Bridget declared they lived upon the ice. Aunt Bridget was a great favourite of the young people, and was most worthy of their respect and love. Genial and warm-hearted, full too of the milk of human kindness, she was entirely devoted to her brother and his family,

to all of whom she was tenderly attached. She was blessed with no ordinary amount of that valuable commodity common-sense, and knew when to hold herself aloof, and when to enforce her authority. She deplored, for many reasons, the second marriage her brother had made, anticipating from it great discomfort and distress to him and his; she also felt how very little she could do to help to mend affairs, both from the cold distance at which Aimée kept herself, and from the short time which she should have to work upon. Nothing daunted, however, she determined to do what she could. She exerted herself to win Aimée, and draw her into something like interest for the family over whom she had voluntarily come to preside. But her well-meant laudations of the boys, and her excuses for Margaret, whose wonderful intellectual powers rendered her—especially in one so young—rather overbearing and disagreeable sometimes, fell alike unheeded on the callous spirit of the young stepmother; while the sweet prattle of winsome little Kitty, and the playful pranks of Harry, seemed only to irritate and

· annoy. For Aimée worshipped at but one shrine —that of her own all-important self.

Yet Bridget saw, in the careless, reckless nature before her, the elements of a kind and generous character. Care and love for others lurked somewhere in her being, she felt sure. Could no hand touch the spring of such emotions, and rouse the latent spark? Bridget's characteristic modesty forbade her imagining that any direct influence she could wield would tell favourably on a character like Aimée's. But she resolved to try and do her own quiet part. She set herself diligently to remove every stone over which, in her new home, Aimée might stumble or fall—to smooth away rough edges, and keep in the background, as much as possible, causes of irritation or annoyance; at the same time contriving that little attentions should meet her, on the children's part, as well as from herself, which might soften, if not please, the exacting young heart. Yet all was so quietly done, that none but a keen eye would have detected the wheels within the wheels. And her reverently-spoken 'Blessed are the peacemakers,' in answer to a

friend's remonstrance with her earnest working on Aimée's behalf, revealed the spring of her unwearied and active self-denial.

Elsie, and Bruce when he was at home, aided her in all her little plans ; but the one on whom Miss Bridget's hopes centred as the most likely to influence Aimée for good, was Flora Dundas, a creature so remarkably engaging, and of such high principles, that one felt *her* heart was in its right and true place.

'Will you come with us to Duddingston to-day?' said Bruce, hastening up to Aimée, as one bright morning she reclined on the sofa reading *Lothaire*. The holidays were fairly begun, and Aimée, who had had preliminary skating lessons, was longing to try her skill on the Loch.

'If I had any one to take me,' she said ; 'but the holidays don't seem to make any difference in some quarters,'—alluding to her husband, who was absorbed in arrears of work.

'Couldn't you—wouldn't you come with us?' said the boy, colouring as he spoke, not knowing how his proposal might be received.

‘Oh, you would be ashamed of my tumbles,’ she answered scornfully; ‘besides, you’re such little fellows,’—speaking out, as usual, her thoughts, regardless of any effect on the feelings of others.

Bruce, whose tender point was his short stature, nearly turned upon his heel, but a kind glance from his aunt, as she looked up from her book, kept him steady, and he said:

‘Oh, do come. We’ll be better than nothing, at any rate; and I think, after your splendid skating yesterday, you’ll get on famously.’

‘Do,’ said Elsie pleadingly. ‘We should like it so much.’

‘Well, if I get my bones broken, you shall answer for it,’ said Aimée, rising as she spoke.

‘No fear, if you’ll trust yourself to me,’ said Bruce, with a look of importance, as Aimée passed him to go and get ready.

‘My own boy!’ said his aunt as she laid her hand upon his head. They understood each other, and not another word was spoken, till Bruce exclaimed:

‘Auntie! come with us.’

‘No, I think not,’ said Miss Bridget, who thought it a good opportunity for Aimée and the young people to be together alone; and Aimée appearing at the moment, the little party started for the ice.

The scene at Duddingston was very animated and attractive. Large numbers of ladies and gentlemen skimmed the smooth surface, and an air of hilarity and good-humour prevailed.

Aimée’s spirits rose with the delightful exercise, and Bruce felt quite proud of her grace and elegance.

‘She’s a regular stunner!’ said some of the Eaglemount boys whom he met,—‘awfully handsome and plucky-looking.’

‘To the mast-head,’ said Bruce as he rejoined his stepmother, who formed the centre of a group of friends, in a momentary pause from skating.

‘Ah, Bruce,’ said Mrs. Dundas as the boy appeared, ‘now for a race with Douglas! To the boat and back again. Once—twice—thrice—off!’ and the two young rivals started for the goal.

‘What a deal of trouble your mamma takes with you all!’ said Aimée to Jeanie Dundas.

The girl looked up in surprise.

‘She’s always busy among you,—at lessons and play all the same.’

‘Mamma!’ said Jeanie. ‘Oh, we could never do anything without mamma.’

‘Why isn’t Flora with you? I am so disappointed she is not here.’

‘She would have enjoyed it greatly, but Douglas wanted mamma so much to come here to-day, that Flora remained to walk with papa.’

In the evening a small party dined at Moray Place, and Aimée having, as she thought, done her part dutifully to the other ladies, longed for a little quiet chat with Mrs. Dundas. The two ladies formed a lovely picture, as Aimée took her seat on a low chair beside the elder lady; each in her own peculiar style and stage of beauty being so charming, and each so remarkably contrasted in form and dress. Mrs. Dundas, who could not afford the large sums which so many of her friends expended on their personal adornment, wore a black *moiré*, full and

flowing, heedless and indifferent alike of the fact that it had done good service in many more seasons than one. Her ornaments were handsome, and in perfect taste ; but the charm o'er all other charms of face and form, was the lovely expression of her countenance, so sweet, and motherly, and kind. She seemed always at leisure to listen, and somehow her words told in a way that was often quite remarkable. Aimée already loved her as much as she admired her, and instinctively turned to her for sympathy in the midst of all her domestic troubles and trials. Aimée, in her proud flashing beauty, was an object of great interest and solicitude to Mrs. Dundas, who saw and understood the disjointed state of matters in the home of her friend Charles Drummond. She noted with pain the unyielding, defiant spirit lurking, even in her softest moments, in those lustrous hazel eyes ; and the gentle words which fell from her kind lips were in sad contrast with the sharp and thoughtlessly unkind retorts which too often flew from Aimée's. She was so accustomed to be richly dressed, and to spend lavishly upon

her finery, that the notion of economy in such matters had never crossed her imagination till Mrs. Dundas had put it there; and her rich blue silk dress, with its Honiton lace trimmings, though older in style than became her years, yet suited well her slight figure, and showed off to great advantage her dazzling white neck and arms, a superb set of diamond ornaments being the sole jewels she wore.

‘Shall we not see the boys to-night?’ asked Mrs. Dundas.

‘Oh dear, no! One can’t be bothered with them at a party.’

‘I promised Ian to sing his favourite “Vago fior” to-night. What a wonderful love for music he has!’

‘Has he? I didn’t know.’

‘A genuine taste for it too. I am so glad he is having music lessons at Eaglemount.’

‘Really!’ looking indifferently round the room.

‘I found the piano such a resource with our little Douglas, when he was so long ill after scarlet fever; and the child made wonderful progress, and is keeping it up with me now.’

‘Goodness! I wouldn’t teach a child music if it was to save its life!’ said Aimée with energy.

‘The whole of the children here are musical,’ continued Mrs. Dundas, ignoring Aimée’s last remark. ‘Little Kitty has the sweetest voice I ever heard in so young a creature. Do let us go and see her in the nursery, will you? She is such a pet of mine, and I haven’t seen her for ages.’

‘I should have thought you had enough of children of your own to satisfy you, without caring for any others,’ said Aimée. ‘Do you really mean you would like to go?’

‘Really,’ said Mrs. Dundas, whose heart yearned over the poor little neglected things. ‘We have time to slip up-stairs before the gentlemen join us here.’

‘Come along, then;’ and both ladies rose and left the room. Aimée opened two wrong doors before the nursery one was reached; and at last, to the amazement of all the inmates of the pleasant apartment, she and her guest stood in their midst.

Nurse, seated by the fire, was being quietly indoctrinated into the mysteries of a new top by Bruce, who along with Ian found it pleasanter and warmer in the nursery than alone in their own cold room. Ian was exhibiting a pair of new skates to Harry's wondering eyes; and while the two little Aireys were fast asleep in an adjoining room, Kitty, in her cot, kept open-eyed watch for something or some one.

A momentary silence ensued, as everybody rose; but no one seemed to know what next to do or say.

'Ah, Bruce,' said Mrs. Dundas, 'you have got one of these famous concerns, I see. Show us if it spins properly. Douglas is quite an adept at his.'

'How is Harry still up?' asked Aimée sharply of nurse. 'Is it not time he were in bed and asleep?'

'It wants ten minutes yet, ma'am, of his usual hour, an' Master's very punctual.'

'Mr. Drummond?' said Aimée, as the others gathered round the table to spin the top.

‘Yes, ma’am, he’s up every night as punctual as the time-gun.’

‘What does he do?’

‘Oh, just plays a little with the children, ma’am, or hears them say a hymn, or tells them a story.’

‘Indeed!’ thought Aimée; ‘and yet he can’t spare ten minutes from his papers to talk to *me* or amuse me!’

At this moment the door opened, and a merry shout greeted Mr. Drummond as he entered. Aimée noted the happy flush which lighted up his face. She seldom saw it now; and yet it was the same which had so often been called forth by the sight of herself.

‘Ah!’ he exclaimed, and he smiled so brightly, and on *her* too; ‘what a party, to be sure!’

‘You,’ addressing Mrs. Dundas, ‘always find your way where Kitty is;’ and hastening to the little cot, he lifted the happy child in his arms and tenderly kissed the sweet wee face.

Aimée stood erect and aloof. Had she not found him out in the very act of lavishing

upon these rivals of her affection the love which should have all been hers? *She* would take no interest in his visit to the nursery, but would let him see and feel her displeasure; and just as her husband was moving towards her, she whispered to Mrs. Dundas, 'I must go back to my visitors,' and swept out of the room. Had she seen, as Mrs. Dundas did, the look of mingled disappointment and pain on Mr. Drummond's face, she would have known how tender was his love for *her*, and how cruel were the wounds she was daily now inflicting upon his kind, noble heart, by her marked indifference to everything connected with his family and home.

Aimée went through her part in the drawing-room with characteristic spirit; and while the look of pain never quite left her husband's face, she appeared in brilliant mood and humour.

Weeks and months passed on, and the alienation, taking its rise from the most trivial beginnings, grew and strengthened. Their house was a dwelling-place, but in no sense a home; the cold, selfish exaction of the young wife seeming



THE STORY OF AIMEE.

to lose none of its intensity from the mortifications which she declared herself to be ever receiving from her husband and each member of his family. Still loving him, and devotedly proud of him as ever, it was in her own fashion alone, and certainly in no way calculated to preserve or strengthen his affection. Not to repeat her systematic indifference to his children, and all their interests and pursuits, she could not be made to see or comprehend the stern necessity for his close and incessant attention to business, nor how entirely her own social position must hang upon his advancement in his profession. She shut her eyes to every plain call of duty, misconstrued acts and words, and succeeded in making herself and every one round her wretched and sad. Poor Mr. Drummond, whose unwearied labours and hard head-work made him long for the rest and recreation which most men find in the bosom of their own families, became exhausted and worn by his fruitless endeavours to adjust his domestic matters. At last, tortured with the reigning discomfort, and with Aimée's ceaseless complaints against one

member or another of his household, he spoke sharply to her, asking her if she thought she were in any way fulfilling the vows which she had voluntarily taken upon herself.

‘I didn’t marry to look after a tribe of children, and to live nearly all by myself,’ she answered haughtily. ‘I thought you would have loved and treated me as you did in the happy days at home.’

‘At home!’ How the words lacerated her husband’s heart!

‘Aimée, you knew everything. I told you of each and all of my children, and of the absorbing nature of my profession; and I did hope that you, the pride of my heart, would have been the very joy of my home.’

He looked at her in his old lover-like way; and she felt she had her own happiness and his in her hands, and that a few gentle words, uttered however tremblingly in his ear, would restore her to her place in his heart, and begin at least a better time. But *she* would not apologize and yield. The fault was his, and only his. It was his part to draw her to

his heart, and, lifting every breath of blame from her, reproach himself, and only himself, for the sorrows of the past. She did not know her husband. She had not fathomed the depths of love and generous forgiveness which were in his heart; still less did she reach up into the high sense of duty which he believed devolved on each, in the sphere they were called to occupy, and which he thought Aimée would be best taught to feel by a firm demeanour on his part.

Miss Bridget had long since returned to her peaceful home, her gentle self-denying efforts having, she feared, produced little real effect. She did not see the fruit. She had been dropping in faith her tiny seeds into what seemed a hard enough soil indeed, yet she looked upwards for the sunshine and the rain to do their blessed part, and hopefully prayed and waited and watched.

The spring was over, and the sweet summer again had returned; yet was there no summer in Aimée's heart, but a cold, hard defiance, and an angry resolution to escape, for a time

at least, from the joylessness of her home. Mr. and Mrs. Waldegrave had promised to visit her at Glengask, and already all preparations were made to transport the establishment from Moray Place to their Highland home. Such was the state of matters when Charles Drummond spoke to Aimée the strangely stern words,—words which it wrung his heart to speak to the fair girl he called his wife, but which he deemed it for their mutual good to have plainly said.

Aimée hastened from the interview with her husband to her own room, and, flinging herself on the couch, burst into an agony of rage and disappointment.

‘To think I should have left them all at home for this!’ she exclaimed wildly. ‘Nothing but bother, and blame, and unkindness, and misery! Oh dear! oh dear!’ and she longed in anguish of desire for her tender mother’s breast on which to weep. Something whispered in her ear that others were sorrowing too; and her heart sank as she recalled her husband’s saddened, care-worn look as she spoke those dreadful words. But she would not dwell on that; she would

only nurse and foster the fancied slights and coldness,—and they were but fancies indeed,—until she worked herself into a resolve, which she speedily put into words in the form of a letter to Mrs. Waldegrave.

‘I cannot, will not, go to that far-away Glengask,’ she muttered, ‘with everybody moody and cross about me. Then Charles will miss me, perhaps. And how I shall triumph, shall I not?’ and she wrote a hasty, pettish letter to her poor mother, who was troubled enough at the painful communications she was ever receiving from Aimée, telling her she was not going to the Highlands, but would set out instead immediately and alone for Thornfield. She had just finished her letter when Elsie knocked, to say that Gold-dust was at the door. Elsie lingered about the room, and at last summoned courage to say that her papa had begged her to persuade her mamma to allow Ronald to accompany her this afternoon.

‘Papa says Gold-dust has got a start, he thinks, he is so excited-looking; and that there are so many excursions and holiday-trips going

on just now, that he is afraid of you. going alone.'

'Why can't he ride with me, then?' said Aimée.

'He hasn't time, indeed,' said Elsie, who in her girl's heart deplored the present discomfort of her home, and whose gentle, loving spirit yearned to see her stepmother something like the happy Aimée she had known her. 'And he is looking forward so to Glengask, where he will have plenty of time to ride with us all. And you do not know, mamma, how lovely it is there!' added poor Elsie, almost piteously, as Aimée lifted her whip.

'I shan't want or need him there so much as here,' said Aimée incorrigibly, moving towards the door. And Elsie, restrained by her tears from following Aimée down-stairs, watched her from the window mount and ride off—alone.



CHAPTER X.


A DISASTER.

'Great truths are dearly bought. The common truth,
Such as men give and take from day to day,
Comes in the common walk of easy life,
Blown by the careless wind across our way.

'Great truths are greatly won. Not found by chance,
Nor wafted on the breath of summer dream ;
But grasped in the great struggle of the soul,
Hard buffeting with adverse wind and stream.

'Wrung from the troubled spirit in hard hours
Of weakness, solitude, perchance of pain,
Truth springs like harvest from the well-ploughed field,
And the soul feels it has not wept in vain.'

DR. BONAR.

' MUST see Flora Dundas!' mentally ex-
claimed Aimée as she turned Gold-
dust's head towards her friend's house,
in one of the handsome West End crescents. Flora
had been Aimée's *confidante* during all her resi-
dence in Edinburgh ; and such was the sympathy

subsisting between Mrs. Dundas and her daughters, that, with Aimée's full knowledge, she also shared in some of the sad confidences which Aimée was ever pouring out in an excited, petulant way into Flora's ear. A happier picture of a genuine home could nowhere be seen than in the Dundas family, and Aimée had from her first introduction to them been irresistibly attracted and won. Mrs. Dundas was the perfect type of a lady and wife and mother. Aimée knew and cared nothing for the spring of her character and conduct,—the deep and genuine piety which was in her heart, and which welled out into her life,—she just knew that she loved and trusted and admired her really next to her own mother. Flora was a charming, unaffected girl, unaccustomed and quite indifferent to the gay life in which so many around her plunged; yet intelligently appreciative and pleased with the circle in which she moved,—a circle which, from her father's position and profession, together with his own refined and elevated tastes, was rendered every way interesting and delightful. Mrs. Dundas

carefully watched over the training of the young people, superintending herself their earlier years of education, and sparing no trouble or exertion to secure for them the best advantages which Edinburgh so abundantly affords in the way of classes and teachers. Flora spoke to Aimée constantly of this tender care, and of the debt of gratitude which she and Jeanie and the young brother Douglas owed to this dear mother of theirs.

‘But,’ said Aimée on one such occasion, ‘it’s simply what all mothers are; and, somehow, I never used to think anything of all mamma did for me but just as right and proper.’

‘But while I think every child should love and obey her parents,’ answered Flora, ‘just look what differences there are. Take Nora and Clemy Sinclair, for instance. Even when they were babies, Mrs. Sinclair left them constantly to the charge of servants, and then she packed them off to boarding-schools, because she said, it saved her so much worry. And now she takes no trouble to interest them at home in anything, but just lets them go here and

there and everywhere, with anybody in the way of a *chaperon* they can pick up.'

'Rather different from Mrs. Dundas,' said Aimée, smiling at her friend's warmth.

'Whereas mamma saved papa a great deal of expense when he was not rich, by teaching us herself when we were children; and even Douglas she helps now, and gives him music lessons, and does everything for us; and we love her as not many children do their own mothers, not to speak of stepmothers.'

'What!' said Aimée, starting with surprise, 'Mrs. Dundas is your own mother?'

'Indeed she is, but not in reality,' said Flora. And for the first time Aimée learnt the actual relationship which subsisted between the charming Mrs. Dundas and Flora and her sister and brother. A qualm of unconscious self-reproach sent a chill through Aimée's heart when she thought of her own actings in a similar position.

In Mrs. Dundas's heart Aimée awakened the strongest interest. Alive entirely to the difficulties of her situation, she at the same time

deplored the course which Aimée pursued,—a course marked by no effort or endeavour after duty in any form, but the dictate merely of her self-conscious and exacting heart. Mrs. Dundas, from her intimacy in the Drummond family, and love both for Charles and his really interesting children, sought by her gentle influence and example to inspire the young step-mother with some right conception of her duties, and of the corresponding interest which the discharge of these duties would awaken in her heart. But, like Miss Bridget, she saw small results from any exertions of hers, and she hoped much from the influence which Flora's high principle and unselfish generosity might exercise over her mind. She was a frequent subject of conversation between Flora and Mrs. Dundas, and many kind, valuable hints Flora got, which she carefully treasured, and sought to transfer during their talks into Aimée's heart.

On the afternoon referred to above, Mrs. Dundas and Jeanie were seated quietly at work in the drawing-room, when Mrs. Drummond was announced, and Aimée walked in.

'Where is Flora?' she asked, glancing round the room for her friend; and great was her disappointment to be told that she was out, and would not probably be home till quite six o'clock.

'Where is she? I *must* see her, Mrs. Dundas, for I am going away.'

'When do you go to Glengask? Not till Wednesday, I think? Flora will be round to-morrow, I know. She arranged her visits to-day to suit that.'

'Oh, but I'm not going to Glengask. I'm going home to mamma,' said Aimée resolutely. 'I *am* going, Mrs. Dundas,' as that lady looked grave. 'I have written to tell mamma.'

'And Charles goes too, of course?' with a look of relief.

'Oh dear, no,' with a scornful laugh. 'He prefers his moors and grouse to me. He will probably object; but that won't matter. I *shall* go.'

Kindly and wisely Mrs. Dundas spoke to the wilful young creature before her, as she stood nervously switching the rug with her pretty

gold-headed whip—Charles's last birthday gift. It was all in vain; and having endeavoured to describe Burn Braes, where Flora had gone to see her friends the Bryces, and where her papa was to pick her up in his afternoon walk, Aimée took her departure to ride to Burn Braes.

Away through the quiet, and at this season very deserted, streets she rode, till at last, emerging towards Bruntsfield Links, she took the direction by Morningside onwards to the suburbs there, being instructed how to recognise the pretty, secluded country-seat of Burn Braes. Unawares, she passed the entrance-gate, and was ascending the beautiful slope leading to the Braid Hills, when, as for a moment she slackened her rein to ask her way, a little dog suddenly flew out of the thick hedge at her side, and, before she could recover her right control of the reins, Gold-dust reared his head, and tore off with his light burden at fearful speed.

'That's fearsome!' exclaimed a labourer, as calling to some other lads he set off rapidly up the hill.

'She's still huddin' on,' said another, as breathlessly he gazed after the flying steed. But a pile of stones, against which Gold-dust blindly rushed, unseated Aimée, and with her foot entangled in the stirrup, she was dragged at a still furious pace along the hard, dry road.

A figure in advance saw the disaster, and with wonderful courage rushed in before the maddened creature and attempted to stop its progress. In the twinkling of an eye Gold-dust started across the road, where he stumbled and fell. Some passers-by hastened instantly to the rescue, and Aimée was raised from the ground insensible and bleeding.

'You have saved her life,' said a gentleman to the girl who had really risked her own life to save another's. 'Who is she? and where shall we take her?'

'I do not know,' was the reply; 'but take her there,' pointing to the nearest dwelling. And Aimée was tenderly raised and carried to the pretty rural residence, and laid on a couch in Miss Mackillop's parlour at Hope Hill Cottage.



CHAPTER XI.

THE CRISIS.

'Pleasant is the joy of grief. It is like the shower of spring when it softens the branch of the oak, and the young leaf lifts its green head.'—OSSIAN.



ONSTANCE RAYNALL—for it was she who had so bravely arrested Gold-dust and saved Aimée from a cruel death—knelt beside the unconscious figure, so prostrate, and so pale and death-like. Miss Mackillop meanwhile sent off to town for the nearest medical man, and was anxiously watching for his arrival. The momentary bustle caused by carrying the lady into the cottage was over, and a great stillness prevailed. Suddenly, as Constance watched, Aimée opened her eyes, and gazed wonderingly around her. A cry of agony escaped her as she attempted to raise herself, and she fell back again exhausted and

cold. Constance soothed and calmed the now conscious sufferer, and gently endeavoured to explain that an accident had happened to her; but she trusted, now that she was safe and quiet, all would soon be well. Aimée again closed her eyes, and every one longed for the doctor to come. In an incredibly short time Janet returned in a cab with Miss Mackillop's own doctor and a surgeon. Janet, with quick-witted forethought, and regardless of how the doctors might relish her quaint little figure bobbing on the box, availed herself of this easy and rapid means of returning home, sure that her services would be in request when 'sic a dreadfu' accident had drove a young leddy into the cottage.'

'Here we are, ma'am,' she said, jumping down as the cab stopped at the door. 'Dr. Coll, and Maister Forsyth wi' him.'

'What! Mrs. Drummond! Bless me!' said Mr. Forsyth in amazement as Aimée's slight figure met his eye.

A careful examination took place, and the doctors looked grave.

‘It is quite impossible to move her,’ they said, addressing Miss Mackillop. ‘Everything will depend upon her being kept perfectly quiet.’

‘I thought she would be detained,’ said Miss Mackillop kindly and composedly. ‘I have got this room made ready for her. Perhaps you will help to carry her to bed.’

‘Now I must hasten to tell Mr. Drummond,’ said Mr. Forsyth, as he surveyed his patient anxiously, and watched the flush which was spreading over her face. ‘You will wait, Coll?’

‘Willingly.’ And the surgeon took his departure.

Mr. Drummond was greatly distressed and overwhelmed by the sudden announcement of Aimée’s accident, and, remembering the painful last words which had passed between them, hastened in a very troubled state of mind to Hope Hill. He took with him—notwithstanding the good surgeon’s assurance that she could not possibly be moved—everything necessary to transport her to Moray Place; and was utterly

shocked to find her, on his arrival at the cottage, in the delirium of high fever.

A guardian angel, as it seemed to him, flitted round her in the person of the beautiful Constance, whose whole soul and sympathies were stirred by the suffering and danger of the patient herself, and the pitiable distress of her nearly distracted husband. In agony he threw himself on his knees by Aimée's side and conjured her to speak; but she tossed away the hand that would have so tenderly clasped her, and intensified his grief by muttering sentences the sad import of which his ear could only too well interpret.

Aimée remained in a most critical condition for several days, and very great was the anxiety entertained on her behalf. Mr. and Mrs. Waldegrave, who had been hastily summoned, found it difficult to retain their composure in the invalid's room. From no other hands would she take medicine or food save from those of Constance, whose attention and care became concentrated upon the poor invalid. Gradually the bruises in the head, which had

caused so much alarm, yielded to the skill and care bestowed upon them. The fractures on her right limb, however, were still an object of anxiety to the doctors; and while every one rejoiced at the cessation of the sad delirium and at the restored consciousness of the patient, the increasing pain and irritation in the limb gave rise to the gravest fears.

‘Where are you going?’ asked Aimée one morning, as Constance, having arranged everything for the comfort of her patient, prepared to leave the room. ‘You are not going to stay away so long as you did yesterday, I hope?’

‘I fear I must,’ said Constance. ‘I am going to Burn Braes.’

Aimée pressed her hand over her pale forehead, as if to collect her thoughts, and then said: ‘Oh, that is where I was going the day—the day I was brought here. What do you do at Burn Braes for so long a time?’

‘I teach music and drawing.’

Aimée turned her eyes in amazement full on Constance as she spoke.

Constance smiled, and said, 'Mr. Drummond is coming, you know; and Mrs. Waldegrave will be with you also. You will not miss me, and I shall of course come straight home.'

'I *shall* miss you,' petulantly. 'Who would not miss you?'

Constance, with whom in our narrative we parted soon after she had been installed as daily governess at Burn Braes, had grown in beauty both of person and mind; the regularity of her life, and even the strain upon her exertions, which Miss Mackillop took care should never be too great, giving tone and vigour to her spirits. True, there were anxieties resting upon her mind, not the least of which was concern for her father, whose health had for some time been exciting serious anxiety. Mrs. Raynall's bulletins were always more favourable than Constance could quite take the comfort of believing, and she was anxiously longing for the next tidings. The birth of the little 'son and heir' had swallowed up all Mrs. Raynall's maternal feelings; and the fears which she entertained of jealousy on the part of Constance and

Blanche for their step baby-brother, made her use every effort to continue them in their present home. Constance, whose heart yearned over her father, and who was especially concerned about his spiritual condition, wrote regularly to him. Her father loved and delighted in her letters; and the little hasty notes which he contrived now and then smuggingly to send her from his sick-room, encouraged her in the belief that a work of grace was advancing in his heart. She had heard that a hope was entertained that her beloved brother was still alive, and also that an expedition was contemplated by Captain Edulphus Ellicombe to venture on his rescue; and although she mournfully marvelled in her heart that Edulf had never sought *her* out, she anxiously yet hopefully awaited the result of the perilous enterprise. Little indeed did she dream that she who had become to her so great an object of solicitude and interest, was so nearly related to Edulf himself!

On her return home in the afternoon she found her aunt in a state of great and unusual

agitation. Blanche was crying in an agony of grief, while Mrs. Waldegrave had been from one hysteric fit to another all day. The cause of all this distress was speedily confided to Constance. It was now ascertained that so serious were the injuries on Aimée's right leg, that no hope was entertained of restoring to her the use of her limb. Constance felt as if a blow had been struck at her heart, and for a few seconds could utter no reply.

'She is longing feverishly for you, Constance,' said her aunt, 'and knows the worst. You will be best able of all others to comfort her, my love.'

Constance repaired to Aimée's room. Receiving no answer to her knock, she gently opened the door, and a scene of quiet anguish met her eye. Aimée, with her arms raised above her head upon the pillow, her long, beautiful hair half veiling her face, which startled Constance by its alarming paleness, lay stricken and stunned; while over her whole being there hung an air of such hopeless weariness and depression as touched the heart with

'That within, which passeth show.'

The rustle which the nurse, who sat quietly in a corner of the room, made as Constance appeared, caused Aimée to turn her eyes, and a look of mingled pain and satisfaction flitted over her countenance as her gaze fell upon Constance.

‘Come,’ was all she said; and Constance, taking the cold hand feebly held out to welcome her, looked into her face with those deep, dark eyes of hers, which ever seemed so eloquently to speak. ‘They have told you,’ slightly raising herself and turning towards Constance,—‘They have told you that——’

‘Yes, I know it all,’ interrupted Constance, who longed to save the painful words.

But Aimée would not desist; and the look of depression changed into one of terrible despair as she exclaimed, ‘That I am doomed!’

Constance pressed her lips on the now trembling little hand, and said, ‘They told me no such terrible thing.’

‘What! Lame, deformed, and that for life! What is that but doomed, and doubly doomed?’

Mr. Drummond, who had anxiously and de-

votedly watched by Aimée during the alarming period of delirium, and while fears were entertained that the bruises on the head might prove seriously great, had, when this solicitude passed away, and Aimée was again conscious and composed, left her for a short time to attend to his duties as sheriff of the county of —. And now, in addition to the anguish which filled poor Aimée's heart at the discovery of her calamity, came the added anguish of fear that the sad deformity in her person might alienate from her the heart which in the days of her vigour and health she had been so careless to make all her own. Charles had married her for her beauty, and friends loved her for her grace; and now that these were gone, their love, she assured herself, would be gone too. She relapsed into a sorrowful state of depression, from which no effort could arouse her, nor could any motive for exertion be brought successfully to bear upon her; and even in after-time she looked back upon those dreadful days as the darkest in all her life.

‘I have had such a queer, dark dream,’ she

continued. 'Oh, it was so queer and cold! I thought I was drowning, and that I seemed far, far from shore and ship. I thought I should be lost, and screamed for help, clutching at every weed and floating straw. Everything, however, slunk slimily from my touch, when, lo! a figure very shining and beautiful appeared floating above me. So eagerly was I occupied in catching hold of anything and everything, that I could only steal an upward glance at the figure, which, although so near, seemed never close. Then everything around me grew hazy and dim; and just as I closed my eyes on every fancied help, the floating figure came near, and a voice like music seemed to say,

"Do not struggle any more,
Only lean thy head on me;
On my white wings thou shalt soar,
I will save and set thee free;"

and just then I awoke.'

Constance, who had sat eagerly listening, did not speak, and Aimée murmured:

'You said it might have been worse, Constance; it could not surely be?'

'It might have been your life, and not your

limb,' said Constance, with touching tenderness. 'Indeed at first we thought it must be so.'

'Not that I might have died!' exclaimed Aimée, scared and terrified as she spoke.

'It might have been,—nay, but for God's goodness, would have been.'

Aimée shuddered. Death and God and eternity were to her mind mere abstract doctrines, from the bare contemplation of which she had ever kept herself supremely free. Gloom and melancholy, she assured herself, attached to them, and she would have no troublesome dealings with such dismal subjects. They were for the old and obscure or blighted,—not for *her*, surely, in the pride of her youth and beauty. Yet here she was brought now to look them in the face as solemn realities, which she had just escaped being brought into contact with; and the look and thought filled her with dismay.

Death!—oh! what is death? Is it not to go away into the dark and lonesome grave, to see no more the ocean and the trees and sky, the green fields and the bright flowers?

And God! Who—what is He? I have never

thought of Him, and know not how. What have I to do with Him? How could I have gone to be with Him?

Terror and consternation filled poor Aimée's heart as thoughts like these swept through her mind, sharpened by the upbraidings of her own accusing conscience. With the energy of a drowning man she clung to Constance as to a strong swimmer, for help and safety. Constance felt that any arguments would be vain and out of place at such a time; and as Aimée lay exhausted by her fear and feelings, she gently whispered in her ear some of the heart-cheering words from God's Book. In particular she tried to lead her to think of Jesus and His great love. 'Come now, and let us reason together, saith the Lord: though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool.' 'As I live, saith the Lord God, I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked; but that the wicked turn from his way, and live.' 'God so loved the world that He gave His only-begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him should

not perish, but have everlasting life.' Slowly, and in the tenderest accents, Constance dropped such passages of Scripture into Aimée's ear, while her mere presence had a soothing influence over her spirit.

'Say that again!' Aimée would exclaim. 'Oh, say these words again! Does God mean *me* when He says that? *Can He mean me?* What kind, kind words! Constance, how have I never thought of this before? I seem as if I had been startled out of a long, long dream.'

Constance showed her from the holy words themselves that it was to such as she they were graciously spoken—yea, even for the most wretched and vile. Aimée's amazement was very great; and she ever and again relapsed into long fits of silence, which were broken by a wondering exclamation, a question, or an oft-repeated request to 'say these words again.'

Next day, and day after day, Aimée renewed her earnest conversation with Constance. Happy for her that she had such a counsellor and friend—that she was in the hands of one who

would not heal her soul's hurt slightly — who knew also how vain is mere human sympathy, and who led her to the true source of joy.

Day by day Aimée's perturbed spirit grew calmer, while at the same time she became increasingly more desirous to drink in the divine message of grace and peace. Light dawned upon the chaos of her soul; for the spirit of God brooded there, and the scales fell from her astonished eyes. Her whole being became dissolved in tender feelings of contrition and regret for the past, in adoring gratitude that she still was spared, and that so blessed a light from heaven had begun to shine upon her dark and earthly soul. Her hard, self-asserting spirit seemed melted under the apprehension of the divine love and pity. Never was 'the expulsive power of a new affection' more remarkably exemplified. Experimentally she was brought to feel that the service of self is a hard bondage, which will yield no available reward, but leads down to darkness and death. Her amazement at her past ignorance and perverseness was intense, and she thought with anguish of her proneness

to self and this world. And now she felt as a bird escaped out of the fowler's snare, fleeing away to nestle in the bosom of one whom she had discovered to be her Deliverer and Saviour-God. Her study of God's word was constant and very earnest. She delighted in the prophetic passages foretelling the coming Saviour, and the work He was to accomplish; and as she turned to the New Testament and read of the patient life of the Man of Sorrows,—of His passing through each stage of life with its own peculiar temptations and trials,—and then realized that not for Himself, but for sinners—for her—it had all been so enduringly, so perfectly accomplished, she would almost startle Constance by the ecstatic expressions of her joy and gratitude.

'Constance,' she said one day, after lying for a long time very still in quiet thought, 'how is it that some good people look so gloomy and sad? This joy does not pass away, I hope?'

'It is not our Father's wish or will,' answered Constance; 'for He delights to see His people glad.'

'What *can* it be?'

'I think it must be because, although there are some rays of genuine light in their souls, they are as yet feeble and small, and the light they have yet only makes their darkness visible. A room whose shutters are closed, and where the thick dust has accumulated, does not reveal its true state until the sunlight is suffered to stream in upon it. So, partial views of divine things may only dispirit. Such persons have enough of religion to make them miserable,—not enough to cheer or satisfy; enough to keep them from rushing into the world's frivolities and sins,—not enough to give them rest or peace.'

Aimée smiled a bright, intelligent smile, and said, 'Ah, but if they come to know anything real of that great love, they will never be content until it fills and rejoices their hearts.'

'Some persons,' continued Constance,—'Christian persons, I mean—wear their grave-clothes all their lives. It is not the Lord's will; for He says when He calls them from darkness and death, "Loose them, and let them go." He would have them to be happy in their pardon and freedom.'

'I am sure He would,' said Aimée.

'And,' continued Constance, 'all the mists and clouds are earth-born, or come up from our own hearts. What a delightful thought, that they can never dim the sun! and if He ever shines in our hearts, no mists can hang or hover there.'

Aimée's residence at Hope Hill was still prolonged,—it was thought so important for her to rest and remain quiet in her pleasant room at the cottage; so deep also was her solicitude about her soul, and so great the comfort which the society of Constance afforded her, that several weeks passed away, and still she lingered on. That chamber, from being one of suffering and grief, became a very chamber of peace; and pleasant it was to see the bright look which lighted up Aimée's face as she now lay quietly and happily there. During this time she had great pleasure in occasional conversations with Miss Mackillop, who was well able to guide and cheer her. From her Aimée also learned much of the sweet beauty and devotedness of Constance's life. She listened with breathless inter-

est to the story of Constance's touching sorrow at her mother's death—of her energetic self-forgetfulness to comfort her father and supply a mother's place to Blanche—of the change which her father's second marriage had made in her once happy home, and of her subsequent life at the cottage.

'Her stepmother,' said Miss Mackillop, 'who was the cause of the girls at first leaving their home, has so contrived and persuaded their father to continue their absence, that from month to month their return to Hilstone has been postponed.'

'But why,' asked Aimée, 'should he have been persuaded into such cruel treatment of his daughters?'

'He is now so enfeebled that he is unable to exercise any sort of control, and is entirely under his wife's iron sway. We are anxiously looking for tidings now, for accounts from another source have reached us of his really serious indisposition; and should he not improve, Constance has resolved to hasten to her father.'

‘What can Mrs. Raynall mean by such unjust behaviour?’

‘She is actuated by the one ruling passion of her life,—to see her son one day the wealthy heir of Hilstone; and a sort of morbid jealousy makes her dread any communication with the other members of the family.’

Aimée thought with self-aborrence of her own unkind, suspicious conduct to those at home.

‘What a contrast to Mrs. Dundas!’ said Aimée. ‘What a beautiful example of a wife and mother she is—how Flora loves and admires her—and how they all look to her as the very mainspring of their home-happiness!’

‘She is indeed singularly attractive; and her life is just the transcript of her heart. Constance, who knows Flora well, and is a frequent visitor at Mrs. Dundas’s, ever speaks with enthusiastic delight of the home circle there, and in particular of the sweet, sacred influence Mrs. Dundas exercises.

‘Constance,’ continued Miss Mackillop, ‘has submitted in the sweetest way to the quietness

and monotony of my home, so greatly in contrast with the style and affluence of her father's house. Not only without murmuring has she glided into all my ways, and adapted herself to all the restraints and limitations which my small means render necessary, but she has actually made use of her talents to supply her own and Blanche's wants, and to save me from any supposed privation which the additional expense of their residence here entailed. And all this in the hey-day of her youth and beauty, when most other girls are living for pleasure and themselves!

'Oh, Miss Mackillop,' exclaimed Aimée, 'it cuts me to the heart to think of her life, in contrast with my own trifled, squandered existence.'

'I have never known another such character,' said Miss Mackillop,—'there is such a combination of personal beauty and grace, together with the highest intellectual powers; while her earnest, quiet consecration of all to God renders her singularly engaging. Her mental powers are equalled only by the unflagging perseverance with which she cultivates and quickens them,

and her cheerfulness and sweetness of disposition make her presence continual sunshine in the house.

‘She might have been soured by her sorrows,’ said Aimée.

‘And morbid and melancholy. But her child-like love and faith in her Saviour keeps her entirely trustful of His dealings with her, being, as one has said, “steeped in love.”’

‘She never speaks of her sorrows and troubles,—to me at least,’ said Aimée.

‘She never parades her own feelings to any, although she is entirely free from that provoking reticence which shrinks from ever confiding the inner feelings of the heart. But great sorrow makes one solitary, I think. God covered the Lord Jesus with darkness to hide His sorrow; so do the hearts of His children love to have *their* bleeding wounds veiled and covered,—open and known only to their Father’s sustaining love.’

‘And yet how tender and sympathetic she is to others!’

‘Singularly so; and so modest and humble.

Just the other evening she told me that the discipline through which she had been called to pass, was, she *felt, the* very training she had required. At first, she said, she had trusted God when she could not trace Him, and she had, through His grace, resolved never to think of giving in. But now she could bless Him for it all, as the wisest and most loving discipline for the soul. Her natural spirit, she further assured me, was proud, and the tendency of her disposition to over-estimate rank and position; and she is persuaded that no mere conviction of the unworthiness of such feelings could ever so effectually have delivered her from their power, as the discipline through which she has passed here. Her influence among those with whom for the last two years she has been so closely cast, has been great and marked. For myself, I love her as tenderly as ever mother loved her child, and cannot sufficiently thank the Lord for bringing her under my roof.'

'And, Miss Mackillop, what would have become of *me* but for Constance?' said Aimée, tears filling her eyes. 'You will spare her to us

at Glengask, will you not?' she added coaxingly. 'And oh with what new hopes and motives shall I, if spared, return to my home!'

As we have already said, Aimée's remorse and self-reproach were profound. She had no words to express her bitter self-upbraidings, as she thought of her coldness and injustice to her husband, and her selfish indifference to his family. And when, as she sobbed out all her sorrow on his kind breast, he folded her in his arms, and calmed the storm, and told her how dear, how doubly dear, she was to his heart, she felt what a noble heart she had trifled with, and how cruelly and selfishly she had misconstrued him. Not a word of reproach escaped his lips; on the contrary, he blamed himself for his want of care and consideration, and drew bright pictures of happy days in store.

Aimée longed for the opportunity to give expression to the new feelings which filled her breast, scarcely, however, daring to hope that God would spare her for active life. But the calm and gladness of her spirit contributed not

a little to the gradual restoration of her general health ; and a day in September was fixed for her journey to Glengask.

Once her soul had been like a trembling bark on the deep, dark waters—a cloud behind and gloom before, with none to steer or guide. Now it was like that other bark where the Saviour slept, who, when the tempest raged violently, rose, and with His voice stilled the storm, saying to the winds and waves, 'Be still,' and there was a great calm.





CHAPTER XII.

BRIGHTENING HOPES.

- ' Teach me to live, Thy purpose to fulfil,
Bright for Thy glory let my taper shine ;
Each day renew, remould this stubborn will,
Closer round *Thee* my heart's affections twine.
- ' Teach me to live for sin and self no more,
But use the time remaining to me yet ;
Not mine own pleasure seeking as before,
Wasting no precious hours in vain regret.
- ' Teach me to live, Thy daily cross to bear,
Nor murmur though I bend beneath its load ;
Only be with me, let me feel *Thee* near—
Thy smile sheds gladness on the darkest road.
- ' Teach me to live, with kindly words for all,
Wearing no cold, repulsive brow of gloom ;
Waiting, with cheerful patience, till Thy call
Summons my spirit to her heavenly home.'

MR. and Mrs. Waldegrave accompanied Aimée and her husband to Glengask, and Miss Mackillop promised to part with Constance for a short visit on an early day, if the next tidings of her father's state

were more favourable. The hopes of the medical men as to Aimée's restoration from her bruises were more than realized by her gradual recovery from them all—all except her right leg, which was so severely injured that lifelong lameness was her inevitable fate. Amputation had been hinted at to Mr. Drummond as a possibility; but such had been the care and attention bestowed upon her, and such the soundness of her constitution, that these gloomy forebodings were changed into the certainty that the limb was saved. Very pale and delicate she looked, as leaning on her husband's arm she quitted the dear, sweet cottage, the scene of such mingled associations of sorrow and joy. It was late on the evening of the same day when the travellers reached Glengask, and were warmly welcomed by the assembled family there. One universal feeling pervaded all,—pity and sorrow for Aimée in the sadly changed circumstances of her health, and a tacit understanding among them that they would do everything to soothe and please the invalid. Mr. Drummond had made them

aware of her critical state at first, and of all the subsequent stages of her weakness, yet were they but little prepared for the very delicate look she wore.

'I don't know what it is,' said Elsie to Margaret that night as they talked over the evening's events in their room; 'but mamma looks to me prettier than ever.'

'She is certainly a great deal pleasanter,' answered Margaret. 'Dear me, I've been thinking that if she was—well, what she was in her health and strength, what *would* she ever be now she was lame and ill!'

'Oh!' said Elsie, tears filling her eyes, 'it is so dreadfully sad; and she did look so kindly at Bruce when he fetched her tea, and wouldn't allow Aunt Bridget to give up her cushion.'

'Yes, and she asked auntie to come over from the cottage and spend a week; and she *was* kind to Harry and Kit, and really seemed pleased to see the creatures.'

'I don't understand it,' said Elsie; 'but if it is always to be like this, it *will* be nice.'

Next morning Aimée was preparing to go out and sit a little in the sunshine, when Mr. Drummond said, 'I want you to see something, Aimee: wait five minutes.'

She smiled and chatted away to her husband, quite on the *qui vive* to know what his little secret was. Presently on the crisp gravel the sound of wheels was heard, and a beautiful low carriage, drawn by a pair of charming grey ponies, drove up to the door.

'I want you to drive your papa and mamma through the grounds, Aimée. Try these ponies. This is my gift to you.'

Tears glistened in Aimée's eyes. She still could drive. Ah, what a pleasure! and how gracefully had her husband reminded her of this! He handed Mr. and Mrs. Waldegrave to their seats, then Aimée, and took his place by her. Mrs. Waldegrave asked Kitty to come, and the delighted child was soon adjusted. Then, lifting the reins, Aimée, with sparkling eyes, and a flush on her too pale cheek, drove off, her spirits exhilarated by the exercise she so much enjoyed.

‘How splendidly she does drive!’ said Bruce as she dashed down the avenue. ‘I’m so glad she still has *that*,’ added the boy kindly. The drive was a charming one; and Aimée had but little conceived of the attractions of her Highland home. Charles pointed out the gardens, and directed their way through romantic bits of glade and den, and then the road to the wide, open moors was taken, over which he hoped so soon with gun in hand to tread.

The mountain air blew bracingly on their cheeks, over the bright purple heather and bonnie blue-bell.

‘We must make the most of the fine weather while it lasts,’ said Mr. Drummond. ‘Aimée, you will have plenty on hand. Driving, you know, is not my *forte*. I am thankful to have so famous a substitute.’

Nor were the evenings less pleasant than the mornings; and Aimée had long, quiet talks with Aunt Bridget about the children, in all of whom she began greatly to interest herself.

‘Shall I ever be such a mother as Mrs. Dundas is to her children?’ she said one day to Miss

Drummond as a rather weary look came over her face. 'How old was she when she began her—new duties?'

'Quite young,' answered Miss Drummond. 'And well do I remember her anxieties as to how she was to get on. But what always struck me in her case was her hopeful, happy temper, and her quiet determination always to look on the sunny side. She faced her position bravely and prayerfully, making each child a study, and seeking to discover their individual dispositions, and to work accordingly. She was often enough damped and discouraged, but still she persevered. Her gentle tolerance, too, for the faults and failings of those under her care, drew out the children's warm affection and confidence; while her very high principle and predominating desire for their best interests made her careful of their training, and judiciously strict.'

'Tell me about her, please,' said Aimée.

'When Mrs. Dundas was married,' said Miss Drummond, 'she had, as she herself told me, formed no plans as to her management of the children, resolving to be guided in her conduct

by circumstances. The foolish talk of servants, as is too often the case, awakened a prejudice against her in the minds of Flora and Jeanie. Her reception from the two little girls was therefore, at first, the reverse of kind. Nothing daunted, however, she set herself steadily and prayerfully to the plain duty of trying to perform to one and all of the children a mother's part. Their petulant ways she soothed, and in the little sorrows of their hearts she sympathized; while her sweet manners, and invariable patience and kindness, completely won their affection and trust. They had never addressed her as mother, until one evening, as they sat with her alone while she told them stories from a prettily illustrated book, little Flora suddenly threw her arms round her neck, and exclaimed passionately, 'Oh! *mamma*, I love you so very, *very* much.' Jeanie followed with a no less warm embrace, and from that moment they were really, in heart and deed, mother and children to each other.

'I never dreamt,' said Aimée, 'that they had not been always real mother and children. How they all love her!'

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judicious friend, had been fostered and strengthened, became quite distressing ; and much of Mrs. Dundas's time was spent beside the little invalid's couch. By her wise and tender dealing, he was delivered entirely from his nervous apprehension of death.'

'What did she do?' asked Aimée eagerly.

'She had been in the habit of praying with Harry, but in her extremity she adopted at last her mother's plan. Her words were short, and perfectly simple. She named the child before the Lord, and, in her petitions, spread out before Him its circumstances of weariness and pain, its temptations, its hopes, and fears. One evening she knelt by Harry's bed, his little hand locked in hers, and the clasp tightened as he heard his own name spoken in prayer.

"Oh! mamma," he exclaimed as she ceased, "will Jesus really know my name? and when I go to heaven will He really say, This is Harry Dundas—his mother told me all about him? And will He have my crown and harp all ready for me? Oh! I'm not afraid now to go away." The heavy burden which had so distressed the

sweet child was gone. He was no longer afraid to die, for his mother had told Jesus his name, and all about him, and He would know and welcome him when he reached the shining shores.'

'How delightful!' said Aimée. 'What pleasant memories Mrs. Dundas will have! Do you know, Bridget,' she continued, 'mamma was always averse to me being a stepmother? I see now the reason why, I was quite unfit; and yet I have such hopes, at least, of doing better now. And since I have begun to look at it in the right way, it all seems a great deal more interesting than it was.'

'I have always,' said Miss Drummond, 'regarded the position of a stepmother, when entered upon in a right spirit, as most noble and disinterested. The opportunity for influence is great. The new mother comes by the choice of him—whose part it certainly is to surround her with an extra amount of consideration as well as love,—to shed new sunshine into a shaded, saddened home, and to fill, by her

tenderness and care, hearts out of which the glow of life has been taken. For myself, I know no fairer sight on earth. It is the cold, scattered embers of a once glowing household fire being re-gathered and re-kindled by a true, loving heart, till the chill air is all driven forth, and the warm atmosphere of love again permeates all around.'

'Ah, but how different it often is!' said Aimée sadly.

'True; but while there are some who rush into the connection ignorant and indifferent alike to the claims and interests which await them, there *are* those who enter upon it calmly and hopefully, stimulated by the highest motives to re-animate and re-gladden a drooping, saddened home. And surely theirs is no common joy when the honoured place of *mother* is accorded to them in these hearts and homes!'

'As it so emphatically is in the case of dear Mrs. Dundas,' said Aimée.

'Well,' she continued, 'I have the same help promised to me, and I have the same hopes to stimulate me; and, Bridget, *I will try*,' she

added, lovingly laying her hand on her sister-in-law's shoulder . 'And you will help me, will you not?'

Miss Drummond could not for a moment speak, so great was her emotion at the change on Aimée. And as she went on in profound humility and sadness to deplore her behaviour towards herself, she could only rest Aimée's head upon her breast, and with glistening eyes assure her how dear she now felt her to be.

'That the children don't all hate me is a blessing,' said Aimée; 'and for that I know I have to thank you, Bridget. Many and many a time I can call to mind your gentle, soothing ways in Edinburgh; all unobserved, as you perhaps imagined they were; and the thought of your efforts at peacemaking helped me in my time of darkness and despair.'

That night Aimée went to visit nurse and her little family in the bright, delightful nursery. Her visit, as well as Mr. Drummond's, was now regularly looked forward to, and with eager pleasure too. And as Bruce and Ian would join the little group by the cheerful fireside,

and nurse slipped quietly away, Aimée told them stories, and listened to their little hymns, and drew their confidence towards her in the simplest, sweetest way.

‘What are you doing here, Bruce?’ she said one evening, as on her way to the nursery she stepped into a pretty little parlour and found the boy alone.

He started, and coloured deeply.

‘Eh, Bruce?’ said Aimée, laying her hand fondly on his shoulder, and looking kindly into his honest eyes.

‘I come every night,’ at last he said, ‘to see my mother,’ and he pointed to a picture on the wall, over which a green gauze curtain fell.

Aimée was deeply touched, but merely said, ‘May I see your—your dear picture, Bruce?’

Instantly, but silently, he reverently raised the little veil, and a face, beautiful and beaming, met her eager gaze.

‘How very lovely, dear Bruce!’ said Aimée, tears filling her eyes. ‘How dear and kind, besides, she looks! And you come every night to see her?’

‘Oh yes, for you know we haven’t this in Edinburgh; and it is such a help. When *she* was here, I got on far better. She used to help me so, and I could tell her *everything*. And oh!’ with a burst of passionate grief as he thought over the love of his now departed one, ‘she was so tender and kind. Every night she came to see us when we were in bed, and spoke to us. She never missed coming,’ added the boy, with sparkling eyes. ‘Whoever was here, or however busy she was, she always came to us.’

Aimée could only bow her face on Bruce’s head and murmur, ‘Oh, if I could be something like what she was to you!’

‘You are so much liker her,’ said Bruce in his outspoken, artless way, ‘since you came up here; and we love you now so much—Ian too!’

Aimée’s eye was again riveted on the picture, and a long silence ensued, each heart being too full to speak. Aimée’s conscience, reproaching her for the past, was again busy as she thought what the feelings of such a boy as Bruce must have been at the strange, cold conduct of her

who was in that mother's place; for his devotion to his mother was intense, and many a time had he cried himself to sleep beneath that picture. And now, could she hope to win such a heart? Yes, she would try; and already the interest he had excited was very strong.

'I know,' said the boy at last, 'that I need not sorrow about *her*, for she is happy now.'

'How blessed to know that!' said Aimée. 'She loved Jesus, Bruce?'

'Oh yes, and she made me love Him too. But sometimes, now I haven't her to talk to about Him, I don't seem the same as I used to be about it.'

'How glad I shall be if you will talk to me about Jesus!'

'You!' with surprise. 'Do you love Him?'

'I do indeed,' said Aimée. 'Oh, Bruce, shall we not together think and speak of Him?'

'Yes,' was all he said as he looked gratefully in her face. Then he said, 'And will you speak about these things to Ian too? He doesn't mind me much, and is getting to think less and less about it all.'

'I will try,' said Aimée, feeling, as she spoke, the increasing weight of her responsible duties; and pressing a kiss upon the noble boy's cheek, she left him to go to the happy nursery-party. A sweet and holy link bound these two hearts together; and the bond was formed, Bruce loved to think, beside his mother's picture.

We stay not to recount the many interesting incidents which drew the earnest young mother to the children among whom she was placed. Many were the mistakes she made, and great, often, were the disappointments which attended her plans; yet, like the giant of old who every time he touched his mother earth rebounded with the fall, only to recommence the fight, so did Aimée, distrusting her own power and projects, seek fresh and continual wisdom and strength from on high; and, in the growing love and esteem of husband and children, learnt to believe that her Father above was owning and blessing her work.

Mr. Drummond prolonged the residence at Glengask as long as could possibly be arranged. The life suited Aimée well, and the quiet se-

clusion tended favourably to draw her and the children together. But at last a day was reluctantly fixed for the removal of the family to Edinburgh again.

Mr. and Mrs. Waldegrave had taken their departure, leaving, however, a promise that they would this Christmas pay a visit to Moray Place; and Aimée prepared to enter upon her home duties in a town life with renewed and prayerful earnestness.

'I don't seem to be doing much,' she said to Bridget the evening before their departure. 'But I suppose I *can* only do a little. How active some people are in good works!' and she heaved a rather weary sigh.

"What she could" is the loving maximum of our Lord Himself,' answered her sister-in-law, between whom and Aimée a strong and loving confidence now subsisted.

'Ah!' said Aimée with an intelligent smile.

'And I think,' continued Miss Bridget, 'many Christians fall into grave error by the way in which they map out work for themselves, instead of taking up the work daily and hourly

which their hand findeth to do, and doing *it* heartily to God.'

'Yes, but looking after a house and children and servants appears all such small work; and when that is done, there seems so little time left for other work.'

'What kind of *other* work?'

'God's work more particularly—more directly.'

'God says, "Let every man abide in the calling wherein he is called,"—that is, don't let any one suppose that after the great change has come over his soul he is to rush away and escape from his social position or secular calling, and plant himself in one which *he* deems more favourable for his spiritual growth.'

'Well, Bridget, that is so very like what mentally I have been doing over and over these last few weeks. I so long to serve God and to live for Him; and I am constantly thinking—almost often in spite of myself—that if I were in such a person's lot, I should get on faster and do more for my dear Saviour. Not that I feel that in connection with Charles—oh no, no!—but with the children. And I like

them all so much better,—quite love Elsie and Bruce and Kitty,—and long to be a help to them all. But still I don't succeed as I hoped to do.'

'You must remember, first of all, that you are only now regaining your strength after a very trying illness, Aimée; and your duty to your husband, and all who love you, entails your taking every care of your health. Then, again, the way in which *you* seem called upon by God to serve Him, is in your family, and by attending to the small, ever-recurring — what some persons would call—trifles of your daily life. It is, however, a great mistake to speak of *trifles*, for that is only our estimate of what in God's sight is momentous and great.'

'Do you mean, Bridget, that if I spend my morning teaching little Kitty to read and driving with Charles, and trying—because he wishes me—to like that dreadful Bach and agonizingly difficult Chopin, and to master their abominable gavottes and *fugues*, that I am spending my time in a way as glorifying to God as a devoted woman who is perhaps a voluntary exile

teaching the poor heathen, and trying to tell them the story of Christ's love?'

'I cannot compare two such dissimilar cases,' answered Miss Drummond. 'I can only say that the whole character of the work done by either is acceptable to God, or not, according to the motive and spirit which actuate the doing of it. "Not slothful in business, fervent in spirit, serving the Lord," is the command. But, as I have heard it quaintly said, there are some persons who raise such a dust round their work, that they cannot see God through it. They have a zeal, but not for God; they are working, not for Him, but for self, in some one or other of its hydra-headed shapes. Whereas, whatever Christ gives me to do,—be it to teach a little child, or keep a house, or tend a sick friend, or visit a poor person,—if I take the duty from His hand, and strive to do it as to Him, it is service to the Lord.'

'Yes, but some of the things—some of *my* things—look so small, so very insignificant, Bridget; and yet you say there are no *trifles* in God's sight.'

‘No; nor in His universe. There are small things, but not trifles; for these very small things make, in their aggregate, the most gigantic things and grand. What, for instance, is smaller than a rain-drop?—what more powerful than a shower in spring? What more easily said than a kind word?—what more soothing and blessed than its effects upon the heart? Our life, in short, is made up of little things, little duties, little pleasures; and he is wise indeed who treats aright each little thing. If God despise not the day of small things, surely it is man’s part rightly to estimate and improve them.’

‘What a help your words are, Bridget! I now see how I can really serve God in my little things.’

‘Let us, dear Aimée, keep close by His leadings, not anticipating, but not either lagging behind; taking up each new duty as *the* very thing we are called on now to do, certain also that in this way shall we best glorify God, and not in tormenting ourselves with vain dreams of what we might have done had our lot been

different. Where duty is, there is the Holy Spirit; and however difficult and steep the road may sometimes be, let us, realizing that it is here our Father has placed us,—here, because He saw that the circumstances of this lot would best prepare us for the home He is preparing for us yonder—without the indulgence of a single murmuring thought,—close thankfully over His appointment for us, and joyfully strive to adorn the sphere we occupy.'

'You put such high, hopeful feelings into my heart, Bridget!' said Aimée, with a grateful smile.

'We are so very apt,' continued Miss Drummond, 'to be always *thinking* what *great* things we can achieve, instead of *trying* to *do* the small things which are our duty. Yet who would trust one with weighty matters who failed to perform the less? I read lately of the rebuke given by an aged minister of last century to a younger brother, who spoke in very slighting terms of his own small country charge: "Oh, my brother," said this venerable servant of the Lord, "you will find your congregation to

have been large enough when you stand to give account before the solemn judgment-seat.”

In this humble, teachable spirit did Aimée now go forward to her duties in her home. Sad and often terrible were the struggles she often had with her naturally exacting and self-conscious heart,—struggles which brought her to her knees, making her realize mournfully what she was, and what she would have been but for the grace which had reached and raised her soul.

Thus her weakness proved her strength; and her simple, growing faith in the Saviour, who had drawn her to Himself, overcame every obstacle, and kept her bravely and cheerfully in the onward, upward path.





CHAPTER XIII.

LOST AND FOUND.

'Let Kedar's wilderness afar
Lift up its lonely voice,
And let the tenants of the rock
With accents rude rejoice.

'Till midst the streams of distant lands
The islands sound His praise,
And all combined, with one accord,
Jehovah's glories raise.'

WE must now ask the reader to return with us to the two friends Edulf Ellicombe and Vincent Durant, whom we left suffering under the like sorrow which had robbed their lives of much of the sunshine of bygone days.

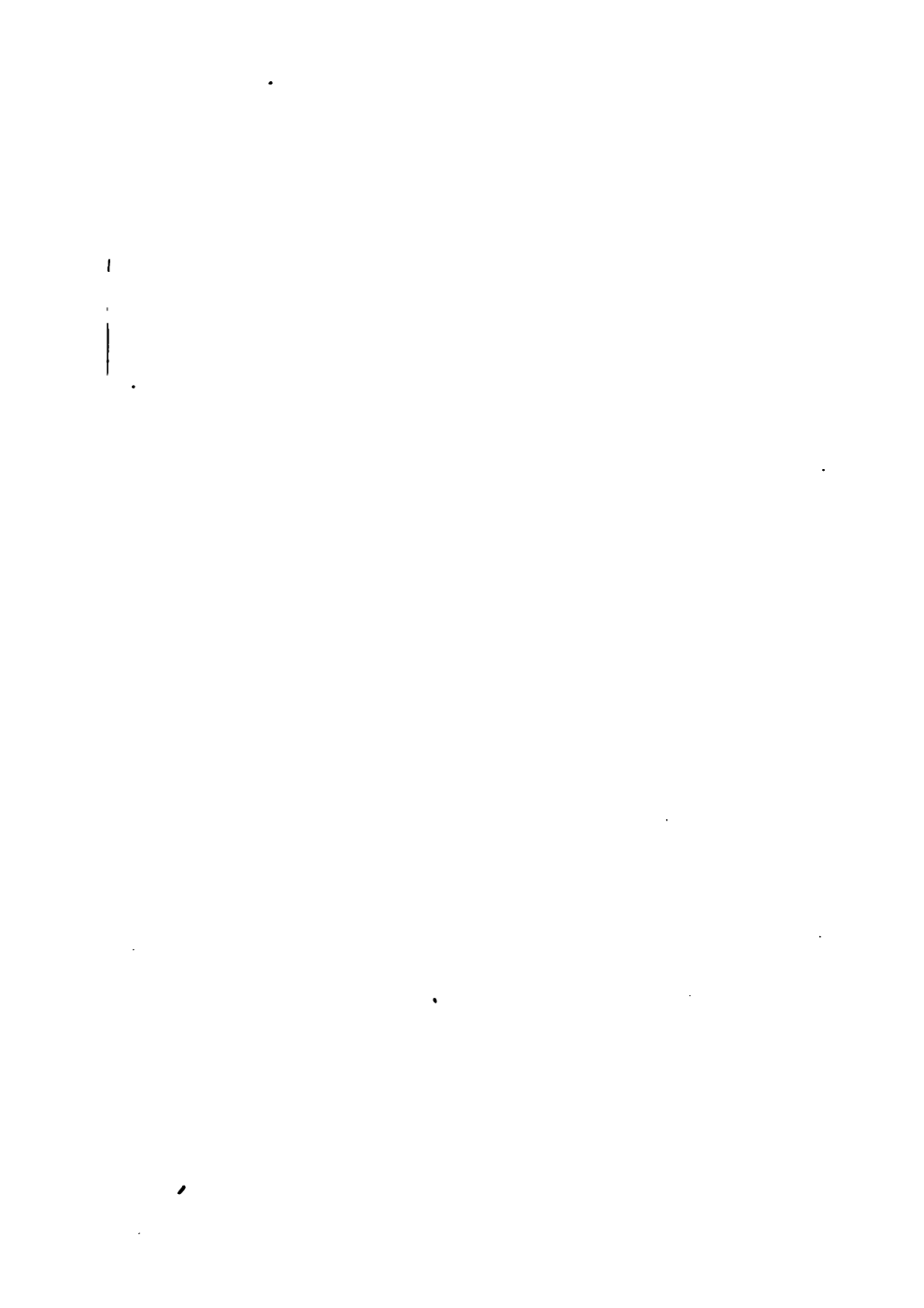
It will be remembered that a rumour had reached them that Clyne Raynall might still be alive. A piece of wood, on whose smooth surface a few water-worn words were traced, had

revived a long slumbering hope in Edulf's breast that Clyne Raynall yet lived.

As the young men talked over this strange piece of intelligence, they were naturally seized with a desire to set off in quest of the lost one. Such an adventure had in itself irresistible attractions for both, and fitted in well with the present tone of their minds, which prompted them to make an escape from home scenes and society.

In addition to all this, Edulf's love for his long-lost friend made him think lightly of any perils or hardships which might attend the enterprise, and the resolution to set out in quest of Clyne was promptly formed. We shall not linger over the preparations they made, nor stay to recount how they obtained a passage in a Government ship, which was on the eve of departure on a surveying voyage to the remote and little-known region forming the southern point of the continent of America.

Edulf's wise and thoughtful mind suggested many arrangements for the hopeful execution of their enterprise, and the whole matter he committed to his heavenly Father's guidance





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and care. Fairly launched on the great deep, the spirits of the two friends revived, while they rejoiced in the freedom of their ocean life, and in the anticipation of a successful issue to their present expedition. Nor was theirs the mere revival of animal spirits, for in his daily companionship with Edulf, Vincent came to discover the secret springs which gave freshness and vigour to his life, and he longed to exchange the frivolous existence he had hitherto led, for the better and nobler one after which he was now taught to aspire.

After a prosperous voyage, the two friends were one day landed on the shore of the bay, which Edulf recognised as the scene of the capture of Clyne. Most reluctantly did the boat's crew leave them in so wild and inhospitable a region; but the spirits of the young men quailed not, and they parted on the understanding that, on her return voyage, the ship should again call at the bay, in the hope of seeing them, or receiving intelligence of their movements in a manner which they preconcerted. Edulf had obtained permission to bring with him in the

ship a store of provisions, with some arms and ammunition. These were landed and carefully concealed in a cave, against future emergencies; while a small stock of food and ammunition formed their sole personal baggage, in addition to a needful but scanty supply of clothes.

They were not long of discovering the stream which had borne the intelligence from Clyne, and had no hesitation in resolving that their course was to ascend the stream, trusting that they should arrive at the native settlement where Clyne was detained. In adopting this course, instead of travelling in the open plain, they believed themselves more likely to escape falling into the hands of tribes possibly still more savage than those among whom Clyne was captive. It was quite true that the universal accounts of the tribes were most unfavourable, representing them as savage and ferocious in the extreme; but if they had spared Clyne, there was hope for them also. Before commencing their journey, they ascended with difficulty to the top of the lofty cliffs which girded the coast, and were appalled as they gazed upon the scene of wildness and

desolation which met their view. Far as the eye could reach in every direction, there was nought but a wide-spread, undulating table-land, exhibiting scarcely any traces of vegetation; and the few stunted trees, which here and there rose above the rocks and huge masses of stone, marked by their appearance the fierceness of the storms by which this region was tormented. A lofty range of hills, too distant for their distinct features to be descried, bounded the horizon.

Descending to the bed of the river, our travellers, first devoutly committing themselves to the guidance and protection of their heavenly Father, with stout hearts and buoyant hopes began their perilous journey.

They had scarcely quitted the bay, ere the bed of the stream became shut in between the two sides of a huge chasm in the rocks, the bottom of which was bestrewed with large water-worn blocks of stone. On the margin a slight deposit of sand and pebbles afforded a difficult and toilsome footway; and so lofty were the sides of the chasm, that the light of

day scarce penetrated to the depths beneath. For the entire remainder of the day our travellers toiled along this doleful path, sometimes scrambling over rocks, and again wading or swimming through deep pools; and when the setting sun withdrew the scanty light they possessed, they lay down to sleep in a cleft of the rock.

All next day, and the day following, they continued their journey, and about noon of the fourth day the chasm began to widen, and the rocks overhead became less lofty, so that a little more daylight cheered their way, and they could discern traces of a footpath, which made their progress easier. Towards evening they came upon a lofty rock over which the stream fell, and, on reaching the summit, they obtained, far onwards, a glimpse of the open land and of the mountains which they formerly observed. With grateful hearts at their brightening prospects, and after supping upon some wild fowl which they had shot in the course of the day and cooked on a fire of dry sticks, they laid themselves down to sleep upon a bank of gravel, overhung by a few stunted

bushes. At daybreak they opened their eyes, to be startled and appalled by a strange spectacle. Peering over the top of an adjoining rock, they beheld a number of shaggy human heads with fierce eyes glaring upon them. They sprang to their feet and seized their rifles, when immediately the savages leaped upon the top of the rock, and a dozen spears were raised at arm's-length. Our travellers, remembering that their rifles were unloaded—all unapprehensive as they had been of enemies so near—believed that their last hour was come. At this crisis a voice was heard, at which the wild men lowered their spears, and a figure somewhat different in appearance from the rest, though equally shaggy and fierce in aspect, approached Edulf and Vincent, and, to their amazement, addressed them in a few words of broken and scarcely intelligible English. They frankly told him who they were, and what was their errand there, eagerly asking if he knew anything of him whom they sought.

‘I do,’ he said, ‘and he is not far off. You must, however, yield yourselves prisoners to these

men. They are less savage than they were, but suspicious of the white man; and your only safety lies in immediate surrender.' All this was with difficulty gathered from the disjointed speech of this singular being, in whom, upon closer inspection and comparison with the fierce men who accompanied him, Edulf saw indications of different blood and race, such as corresponded with his speech.

With hands bound behind their backs, and deprived of their arms and provisions, they were marched on, surrounded by the natives; and soon emerging from the narrow ravine through which the river passed, they entered a valley, which, though possessing no features of fertility or beauty, was yet pleasing and welcome after the gloomy scenes through which they had passed. From the upper part of this valley a band of natives, all of them like those by whom the captives were guarded, wearing the scantiest possible clothing, rushed down to meet the approaching party, and, by the strangest grimaces and contortions, they expressed their amazement at the sight of the prisoners. No-

thing could be more rude and wretched than the habitations of these poor creatures: they literally burrowed in caves and holes of the earth, and the figures of the women and children were seen peering curiously but timidly from their miserable holes. Only one erection, consisting of a small hut made of turf and branches, met the hasty glance of Edulf and his companion. In reply to an inquiring glance directed towards this hut, the mysterious leader of the party said, 'He's gone with the chief and a band to get food for us, for we are starving. He'll be back to-morrow.'

As night was falling, Edulf and Vincent were conducted to the hut, in which they were delighted to see traces of a civilised occupant. Worn with their journey and the excitement of the day, they soon fell fast asleep on the couch of interlaced branches which occupied a corner of the apartment. Next morning at break of day, on looking out from the door of the hut, they found themselves close prisoners, a band of natives with spears and bows and arrows encircling their dwelling. A scanty

breakfast, drawn from their own wallets, had just been placed before them, when they heard shouts in the distance, and the whole community was presently astir to receive the returning chief.

We shall not venture to describe the amazement and rapture of Clyne Raynall as he saw two white men in European attire standing at the door of his hut, and, on approaching nearer, recognised the form and features of his beloved friend Edulf Ellicombe, who immediately, but less easily, identified him. Very great indeed was the change on his appearance. His attire was nearly as scant as that of the savages around him, and his features were browned by exposure to the weather, while his long hair and beard almost obscured his face. But the sound of his voice, and the ardour of his embrace, immediately revealed Clyne Raynall to his rejoicing friend; and as they rushed into each other's arms, tears mingled with their joy, and Edulf's heart was touched by the marked proofs in Clyne's emaciated figure of hardship and privation.

Meanwhile the natives were eagerly seizing and distributing the spoils of the past day's hunting; and slight was the cooking bestowed before they greedily devoured their prey.

The three friends sat down by the door of the hut, and Clyne's eager questions about those at home were soon answered; while, in his turn, he gave a thrilling sketch of his own remarkable escape and subsequent life.

The reader will remember that we parted last with Clyne struggling in the water, surrounded by the band of savages who had come upon him while in search of game, and who pursued and followed him into the sea,—how also to the onlookers escape seemed impossible, either from drowning or from the merciless natives.

On returning to consciousness—such was the narrative which Clyne related to Edulf—he found himself being rapidly carried by the natives, over rocks and crags, away from the shore to a cleft or ravine. There they threw him on the ground, and by the dim light—for night was falling—he perceived that an eager

breakfast, drawn from their own wallets, had just been placed before them, when they heard shouts in the distance, and the whole community was presently astir to receive the returning chief.

We shall not venture to describe the amazement and rapture of Clyne Raynall as he saw two white men in European attire standing at the door of his hut, and, on approaching nearer, recognised the form and features of his beloved friend Edulf Ellicombe, who immediately, but less easily, identified him. Very great indeed was the change on his appearance. His attire was nearly as scant as that of the savages around him, and his features were browned by exposure to the weather, while his long hair and beard almost obscured his face. But the sound of his voice, and the ardour of his embrace, immediately revealed Clyne Raynall to his rejoicing friend; and as they rushed into each other's arms, tears mingled with their joy, and Edulf's heart was touched by the marked proofs in Clyne's emaciated figure of hardship and privation.

Meanwhile the natives were eagerly seizing and distributing the spoils of the past day's hunting; and slight was the cooking bestowed before they greedily devoured their prey.

The three friends sat down by the door of the hut, and Clyne's eager questions about those at home were soon answered; while, in his turn, he gave a thrilling sketch of his own remarkable escape and subsequent life.

The reader will remember that we parted last with Clyne struggling in the water, surrounded by the band of savages who had come upon him while in search of game, and who pursued and followed him into the sea,—how also to the onlookers escape seemed impossible, either from drowning or from the merciless natives.

On returning to consciousness—such was the narrative which Clyne related to Edulf—he found himself being rapidly carried by the natives, over rocks and crags, away from the shore to a cleft or ravine. There they threw him on the ground, and by the dim light—for night was falling—he perceived that an eager

mere boy. At first the natives treated him as a curiosity, and he amused them with his agility and monkey tricks. Several times they were on the point of eating him in their straits, for he soon discovered they were cannibals; but by the favour of the chief he was spared, and as he grew up his cleverness and fertility of resource gained for him a position of influence, and even of authority, in the tribe. He had no recollection of any name, and the savages had given him an unpronounceable title of their own; but Clyne called him Wapping, and such became his name.

Clyne took the greatest interest in this poor outcast, and soon enabled him to recover a considerable portion of his native speech. He had never been taught to read, and was as ignorant as the heathen around him of God and the world to come. From the moment of his capture, Clyne was closely and jealously watched by the tribe; but, through the influence of Wapping, he was gradually permitted to accompany them on their hunting excursions. Their favour was further conciliated

by the intrepidity of his character, and by the efficient aid he rendered in repelling the frequent attacks of neighbouring tribes; while the exercise of a little medical skill which he possessed, and which he employed in alleviating the sufferings of the wounded and diseased, invested him in their superstitious minds with the charm and dread of the supernatural. To his great joy he discovered that his small pocket-Bible, from which he drew such consolation to his own soul, was safe; and by means of it he was able to teach Wapping to read, and to impart to him the elements of divine and saving knowledge. It was marvellous, said Clyne, to witness the effect upon this poor man of his first perception and apprehension of the truths of the gospel; and as they gradually opened upon his mind, his whole being and nature seemed to be expanded and transformed. From being degraded and ignorant he became a man indeed, and eagerly sought to convey to the poor savages around him those sacred truths which had quickened and rejoiced his own soul.

Such was Clyne's story of his past strange

life. As he concluded, Wapping approached, and they all looked with grateful interest on the strange, weird being to whom they were one and all alike indebted for the preservation of their lives. After nightfall, Edulf, as he gazed out upon the new curious scene in which he so remarkably found himself, witnessed with delight a spectacle which rejoiced his heart. Round a large fire kindled over-night was gathered a group of natives, among them women and children, with Wapping seated in their midst. Gravely and earnestly he talked to them of things which seemed to rivet and absorb their minds, as was abundantly evidenced by the eager looks of the listeners, by the occasional exclamations of surprise and delight, and by the showers of questions with which they taxed poor Wapping's recently acquired knowledge, and still imperfect powers of exposition.

The exigencies of our story compel us to hasten over this part of the narrative. As may easily be supposed, the ruling desire of the three friends was to make their escape. Clyne and Wapping had for some time meditated

such an attempt; but the danger of falling into the hands of surrounding tribes, more savage than those with whom their lot was cast, and the impossibility of finding any means of escape from the country, had hitherto deterred them. It appeared, however, to Edulf that Providence was opening up a way of which they might avail themselves to escape. In the half-famished condition of the natives it would be easy to persuade them to go down to the bay with the prospect of obtaining food. It would indeed be needful to be sparing in the use of the supply which lay hid there, as some time must necessarily elapse before the return of the ship. Yet, with the aid of the hunting expeditions of the natives, the hope was entertained that the supply might not be too soon exhausted. Little difficulty was experienced in inducing the chief to listen to this proposal; and it needed but small preparation in order to convey the whole community to the shores of the bay. By the efforts of our friends great improvement was here effected in their mode of life. They were induced to abandon many of their barbarous

customs, to construct huts, and to adopt many small but initiatory steps of civilisation; and in all these endeavours the influence of Wapping, and of the new life by which through Clyne's instrumentality he was inspired, was singularly manifest.

Many weeks soon passed away, and the returning ship was looked eagerly for. At last she hove in sight. The chief, and indeed the whole tribe, had now come to regard Clyne and his friends no longer as captives, but as friends and benefactors. It was therefore a difficult matter to induce them to entertain the idea of their departure. So fully, however, had they gained their confidence, that they readily received assurances that from the great and happy land to which they were going they should from time to time receive proofs of their continued interest in their welfare.

It is doubtful whether or not their departure would really have been permitted, had not Wapping, who at first had intended to accompany them, resolved to remain and cast in his

lot with these poor people. He was led to this resolution by the great improvement which had already taken place among them, and by the simple and genuine hope he cherished that he might be the means of saving them from temporal destruction, and an instrument too of imparting that knowledge and implanting those habits which might effect their gradual elevation in the scale of humanity. Clyne and Edulf rejoiced in the prospect which was thus opened up of establishing this oasis in the desert, and resolved to use every effort at home to send forth not mere temporal aid, but to institute here also a mission, which might be instrumental in introducing the blessings of Christianity into this benighted region.

Their parting from this barbarous people and shore was more touching than could possibly have been conceived, and in particular they said adieu to Wapping with emotions of the liveliest interest and regard. A strange and sacred tie was formed between those who had been so remarkably brought together; and as the little boat drew off from the shore, the

thrill of joyful exultation which filled the hearts of the emancipated, was tinged with tender feelings of regret as they bade farewell and parted with the dusky weeping faces on the beach.






CHAPTER XIV.

HOME AGAIN

'Love is life's end ! an end but never ending,
All joys, all sweets, all happiness awarding ;
Love is life's wealth (ne'er spent, but ever spending),
More rich by giving, taking by discarding ;
Love's life's reward, rewarded in rewarding ;
Then from thy heart fond care remove :
Ah ! shouldst thou live but once love's sweets to prove,
Thou wilt not love to live, unless thou live to love.'

SPENSER.

 H, mem ! here's that telegraphic boy
agin,' exclaimed Nelly, running hastily
into Miss Mackillop's room ; 'an' the
telegrap's for Miss Constance. Will't be guid
news or bad this time, I wonder ?' she added to
Janet, running back to the kitchen.

It was but two days after the departure of
Aimée and her friends from the cottage. No
English letters had arrived this morning, and
Constance and Blanche comforted themselves
with the last tidings from Mrs. Raynall, which

were quite encouraging. It was settled that, if continued favourable accounts of their father were received, Constance should start for Glengask the following week, while Blanche was invited to accompany some of the Bryces on an excursion to the Trosachs. This day's telegram, however, overturned all these arrangements. It was from their own doctor at home, summoning them to Hilstone at once, as their father appeared to be dying. Hasty preparations were made for the departure of the two deeply distressed girls by that night's train for the south, and faithful Nelly attended them to the station with a heavy heart and tearful eyes. They reached Hilstone the following afternoon, and their hearts glowed with thankfulness to be told that their father still lived and was quite conscious.

'He is constantly asking when you will arrive,' said Dr. Hedley to Constance; 'and the hope of seeing you has done him good.'

Constance was very soon by her father's side, and the old man wept like a child as his eye fell feebly but fondly on his daughter.

'Ah,' he said, 'you have come at last. How I have longed for you, Conny!'

Constance soothed and cheered her father, and marvelled at the change on his naturally irritable temper. He was wasted and worn—sadly indeed; but there was a light in his eye which told of peace within, keeping him amid the trials of decaying nature.

Under his pillow a little pile of letters lay, and a Bible. Constance found the letters were hers, and that the sacred volume was as his meat and drink. Together they talked of Him whom each now could claim as a Saviour; and if anything was wanted to complete the joyful surprise with which Constance listened to her father's simple story of his own great change, it was to be told from the same honoured lips that he owed it all to her.

The words so faithfully yet respectfully written found him tossed about, but not comforted, with none to deliver, heart-sick and weary: they told of a rest and a refuge such as his spirit craved for. He eagerly sought that refuge, and found all his wants supplied from the

glorious fountain of a Saviour's love. And the one sorrowful regret of his soul was, that this blessed turning had come so late, when the dregs of a long squandered life were all he had to offer his Lord. How he loved to hear Constance read the passages descriptive of the divine care and gentleness for the aged, and the promises to such!

During the few weeks which Mr. Raynall lived after the arrival of Constance and Blanche, Mrs. Raynall was comparatively little in her husband's room. She came indeed at regular intervals, and had a way besides, very distressing to the weak man, of suddenly appearing before him and Constance at the most unlikely times. But once satisfied that their 'talks' were, as she usually found them to be, on matters connected not with this life, but with that on the brink of which the old man was standing, she retreated soon; and, the nearer the dark river was approached, the more sensitively did she shrink from the chamber of death.

One evening, as his daughters had finished singing with their soft, low voices the hymn



he loved so well—'For ever with the Lord,'—he softly laid his head on Constance's breast, as a tired child would pillow its wearied frame in a mother's arms, and, smiling a last fond look upon them both, gently passed away on the very wings, as it seemed, of the sweet melody they sung, and Constance and Blanche were orphans—alone in the wide, wide world.

On the evening of the day when together they had followed the mortal part of their father to its last resting-place in the quiet country churchyard, the announcement was formally made by the lawyer that Mrs. Raynall's child, Augustus Raynall, was heir of Hilstone. The estate being entailed, there was no will. Mr. Raynall had an intensely morbid shrinking from wills, and had sheltered himself against all propositions to make any such settlement, by the fact that Hilstone being entailed, there was nothing for him to do: he would arrange for his daughters before he died. But this Mrs. Raynall strove hard to prevent. A few days, however, before his death, he seemed to awake to the true circumstances in which his daughters would

find themselves were no specific provision made for them ; and hastily he framed a short deed in their favour. Mrs. Raynall, whose sensibilities on such subjects were singularly keen, scented out this little legal episode, and she laid her plans accordingly. When, therefore, Mr. Penman produced and read the brief settlement whereby Mr. Raynall made a suitable provision for each of his daughters, Mrs. Raynall being alive to all the bearings of the case, immediately remarked that these legacies were of no avail, as there were no means of meeting them except by the estate, which belonged by entail to her son. Constance was stunned to hear such sentiments from her stepmother, whose own provision in her marriage contract was so exceedingly ample, and who besides would have the control, during her son's long minority, of his large income. But Mrs. Raynall's assertion was fixed and determined ; and as she had strict law on her side, Mr. Penman had no redress for his two young clients.

‘ If your dear good father had only consulted me,’ he said afterwards to Constance, ‘ I could

have adjusted the deed properly; or—or if *she* had a soft spot in her heart, we might work upon her feelings, and appeal to the certainty of what her husband's *wishes* were. . . . But, my dear young lady, it is, I fear, a hopeless case.'

'Quite,' was Constance's reply.

'I need scarcely say how gladly I offer my services,' said worthy Mr. Penman, 'if these can be of the least comfort or avail to you. I little thought we had such a Turk to deal with.'

'Thank you, with all my heart,' said Constance, extending towards him her hand; 'I do appreciate all you *have* done for our benefit, and quite feel that this, like every other step of our lives, is portioned out for us by our loving Father.'

'But,' said the lawyer, on whose astonished ear Constance's clear, calm words fell so softly, 'you must have wherewith to live upon. And you who are entitled to—to—bless me—what is your own,—your father's at least,—and now to see it all swallowed up by an invader like that—coarse woman!'

'Indeed we shall manage nicely,' said Con-

stance cheerfully. 'You don't know what resources we have within ourselves. Our Aunt Mackillop has asked us to make her house our home, if'—and her voice quivered—'if we should really have to leave this.'

Mrs. Raynall's behaviour was unfeeling and hard in the extreme during the days which intervened before Constance and Blanche should take their final departure from their old home—the former to resume, on a scale more extensive still than heretofore, her exertions on her own and Blanche's behalf. Blanche was in a storm of rage and sorrow, which all Constance's affectionate endeavour failed to calm or allay. The injustice of Mrs. Raynall, who knew from their father's settlement what his wishes for them were, her indifference to her husband's death, and her fulsome indulgence of the spoiled 'heir,' together with the vulgar display and ostentation she made of her honours and wealth, threw Blanche into a perfect paroxysm of anger and disgust. The heart of poor Constance was bleeding at this accumulation of sorrow. Her father gone, and that solemn chamber of death so vividly before

her—the last look which she was now casting on scenes so sacredly enshrined in her bosom—the monotonous life before her, with the mortification of her own tastes and pursuits,—such were the thorns in the flesh. Ah! but through the thick clouds, and clear over them all, her trustful spirit soared; and her patient, listening ear caught the voice of her beloved saying, ‘My grace is sufficient for thee, for my strength is made perfect in weakness;’ and ‘most gladly, therefore,’ she bent her meek head and lifted the cross she was called on to carry.

‘Thou, Lord Jesus,’ was the language of her heart, ‘art my portion which I did choose. Not a portion hereafter only, but a present, blessed, soul-satisfying portion.’

Ah yes, the exchange of the world for God, and the service of sin for the way of heaven, leaves no room for regret in life, in death, or in eternity. The Christian’s darkest hour is ten thousand times brighter than the fairest day of the ungodly. Constance could take up the language of old and say, ‘The bands of the wicked have robbed me;’ ‘but I have all, and abound.’

She felt that she could live splendidly upon God, though all were beggary around. And the light was in her eye, and the beautiful look upon her face, telling of a heart not merely submissive, but glad.

It was the day before the sisters were to leave; their presence seemed a burden to Mrs. Raynall: the parting with their home must come, and there was no need for further delay. The morning post had just come in, and Constance, whose eye glanced over several letters addressed to her, passed from them to a newspaper, the handwriting on the address of which she did not recognise. She opened and glanced over the columns, and, as her eye lighted on a paragraph, Blanche, who watched her sister, saw her become visibly excited.

‘Blanche!’ at last she exclaimed, ‘look here!’ and she eagerly pointed to the paragraph against which a mark, to attract attention, was placed. It contained an announcement—thrilling indeed to the hearts of those who read it—of the return of the vessel on board of which were Clyne Raynall—believed to have been drowned, or

murdered by savages several years ago—and his intrepid friends and deliverers, Captain Edulf Ellicombe and Vincent Durant.

Scarcely had Constance and Blanche attempted to take in something of the meaning of this announcement, when Mr. Penman entered with letters and telegrams in hand. He hastened forward to Constance, and with deep emotion exclaimed, 'I am not the first, I see, to bring you the news. I have letters informing me of some particulars of the arrival, and a telegram from—my dear young lady—from your long-lost brother himself, to say he will be home to-night!'

'What joy!' said Constance. 'To-night did you say, Mr. Penman?'

'To-night—yes, to-night!'

Blanche had no distinct idea of all that the reappearance of Clyne involved; and when Mr. Penman in his brief, rapid way explained that Clyne, as his father's eldest son, was heir of all his property, the excited girl was wild with joy and exultation.


'Then we shan't have to go away, after all!' she exclaimed in a transport of delight. 'It

is a complete turning of the tables. *She* will have to go, and that nasty little, cross, ugly child ;' and she danced exultingly round the room.

'What is all this noise and hubbub?' said Mrs. Raynall, sweeping into the room. 'Blanche, pray remember whose house you are in, and be a little more modest in the circumstances.'

'It is just thinking of that very thing that has made me so merry,' said the saucy Blanche. 'This is Clyne's house, and not yours. Our brother Clyne is home, and is coming here to-night!'

And notwithstanding all Constance's inter-ventions, Blanche flew about the room in a manner highly diverting to Mr. Penman at least, who could not find it in his heart to attempt any soberizing efforts over the delighted girl. With respectful dignity, however, he informed Mrs. Raynall of the actual state of matters. Rumours had indeed reached her when the first tidings of Clyne's supposed safety came home, but she had dismissed the unpleasant subject from her mind—trusting to the savages, or the sea, and the general air of



improbability which she declared surrounded the whole case, to preserve her and her idol from any rude invasion of their peace. The fact that her husband was dead, and her child the acknowledged heir of Hilstone, had sealed her imaginary safety, and the abrupt announcement of Mr. Penman fell with terrible weight upon her heart.

‘What!’ she exclaimed, turning pale with surprise and rage. ‘Don’t tell me any fables. Clyne Raynall is dead or drowned years ago; and you needn’t expect to pass off any swindling imposition upon *me*.’

‘Madam,’ said the lawyer with freezing hauteur, ‘you forget to whom you are addressing yourself. I hold in my hand a telegram from himself; and, as the lawyer of the family, it is my duty to acquaint you of his expected immediate arrival, and to inform you of the entirely altered position and circumstances in which this strange event now places you and your son.’

Mrs. Raynall’s anger and disappointment were pitiable to witness; and the rest of the day

was spent in a restless moving from place to place, with frequent outbursts of the most passionate rage. Constance sought to calm her, and to remind her of what yet remained to her in the person of her child; but neither such reflections, nor the assurance that Clyne would be the generous friend to her as to all others, seemed to convey one drop of consolation. Her reign and triumph were at an end, and nothing could atone for that. The day was passed by Constance and Blanche in a very desultory manner, chiefly in preparations to make the welcome to Clyne as cheerful and bright as possible.

As the hour of arrival drew near, an almost feverish excitement pervaded every one. Mrs. Raynall had a mental conviction that the whole thing would turn out to be a myth, while Constance's heart sang for joy at the thought of again seeing the brother she had so honoured and loved, and for whose sheltering heart and arm she had so often longed. Blanche was brimful of joy and spirit. A great weight was lifted off her naturally buoyant heart, and the

effervescence of her happiness would run over. The large hall was cheerfully lighted, and the drawing-room was warm and bright. Locker, the old family butler, and one of the very few who had survived what among the old servants was termed 'the reign of terror,' was full of importance and agitation. Suddenly, by the eager listening ears within, the sound of carriage wheels was heard, and, in what seemed to Blanche the twinkling of an eye, Mr. Penman entered, and was followed by a tall, sunburnt, somewhat grave-looking man, who, the instant his eye fell upon the beautiful girl dressed in deep mourning, rushed towards her, and locked her in a brother's strong, fond embrace.

'Clyne, my own Clyne!' she murmured, in tones that were music to the wanderer's ear.

Then, as if remembering that they were not alone, and that there were others to claim his love, he turned to Blanche, whose spirits had undergone a sobering sort of influence by the scene before her. Clyne folded her in his arms, and satisfied her entirely with the pleasure and

affection he expressed at seeing his 'little sister' of bygone days.

'Oh, Edulf, forgive me!' said Clyne, turning at last to a figure who, pale and motionless, stood as if petrified while this meeting was taking place.

'You know each other,' looking towards Constance, who for the first time perceived, under the shade of a pillar, another figure.

'Mrs. Marjoribanks, my faithful friend and deliverer, Edulf Ellicombe.'

Constance, recovering from her emotion and surprise, advanced to meet and welcome Edulf warmly; but looking archly at her brother she said, 'You must not give me any fanciful titles, Clyne.'

Blanche's wild spirits instantly rose, and her merriment was extreme as she exclaimed, 'Mrs. what, Clyne? Surely you are not mistaking Conny for Cousin Julia!'

'What!' was all Edulf could stammer out, as a whole tumult of thoughts almost convulsed and choked his utterance.

'Why, Edulf there is my informant,' said

Clyne, as they passed into the quiet drawing-room. 'He has insisted and persevered in thrusting this assurance upon me; and what could I do but believe him? And I was just on the point,' he continued, laughing, 'of making pathetic inquiries for your venerable lord and master, Conny;' and he looked a bright, relieved look at the blushing face before him.

'Can I—how can I have been so infatuated as to believe it?' murmured Edulf, gazing on the slight, lovely form and dazzlingly fair face before him. 'But they told me—they did indeed—that you ——'

'No, no; it was Julia,' interrupted the merry Blanche,—'Cousin Julia, who came to stay here when we went to Scotland. Oh, Captain Ellicombe, how could you think Conny would marry old grumpy, bald, gran'pa Marjoribanks?'

The little pert speech made every one laugh, and set all at ease again. Ease, did we say? Ah! there were two hearts beside that of the exile himself that beat with emotion too deep, far too deep, for utterance.

Mrs. Raynall remained in her own apartments that evening, and Blanche ran about showing Clyne this apartment and the other, through all of which he went

‘ With all the impatience of a man
Who, having long been absent,
In haste runs over every room,
In pain to see the whole.’

Eduf and Constance were thus left alone together. What reminiscences were theirs! and what a tide of memories swept through their minds! Eduf poured out the ardour of his long, deep love into Constance’s happy ear, telling her what her faithful words had been to him, and what his glorious hopes now were; then he recounted the story of her reported marriage, with the particulars which Miss Grantham had so drearily detailed, and which he could not but entirely believe; and as he closed his touching little tale he looked anxiously into her pure, beautiful face, and breathlessly asked if she could return his love.

She held out her hand, and as he caught it to his lips she said, in tones which thrilled his heart:

‘My one—only—love,’ and bent her blushing face upon his arm.

‘Constance, my treasure—my own,’ said Edulf in a transport of happiness.

Together they sat, in the rapture of true, restful love; and it seemed as if the bliss of the present was enhanced by the sorrows of the past.

‘I could scarcely prevail upon this man to come with me to-night,’ said Clyne to Constance, as he and Blanche, having finished their tour over the house, rejoined the young couple in the drawing-room. ‘But really you don’t look a bit as if you regretted the journey,’ he added, as Edulf’s flushed, radiant face met his eye.

‘No wonder he didn’t care to come, if he expected to see Mr. Marjoribanks,’ said the knowing Blanche, with a mischievous look at her sister’s blushing face.

‘Captain Ellicombe, I knew you at once,’ she rattled on, ignoring all Constance’s pitiful looks to be silent. ‘I have often, *often* seen you. Conny has a locket with you in it; and she used, when she thought I was asleep, to

gaze and gaze at it. Of course I wanted to know what this attraction was, and looked too, when Conny didn't know; and I would have recognised you anywhere.'

This speech threw Constance into such an overwhelming state of confusion that she was glad to escape out of the room, and try for a few minutes in the quiet of her own apartment to realize her happiness.

That night the restored master of Hilstone gathered his household together in family worship, to praise Him who had brought those present so happily together,—to thank Him, too, for the sweet hope they had concerning those now gone from their midst, and to supplicate His grace and guidance on the coming years.

A week, and then a fortnight, passed swiftly away. There was so much to do and talk about, that they took

'No note of time save by its flight.'

Clyne acted in the most kind and delicate way towards his father's widow, begging her to continue her residence at Hilstone as long as

she pleased or wished, and making the most generous arrangements for the baby boy.

Mrs. Raynall's hard, suspicious nature was touched by such unmerited kindness, and she confidently entrusted all her affairs into Clyne's hands. She prolonged her residence at Hilstone, in a way very exasperating to Blanche at least, who could not restrain within decent bounds her glee when the lady announced her intention of removing herself and her belongings to a London residence. So much of burden and care now being removed from Clyne, he set himself vigorously to attend to the claims of the tenantry and dependents on his estate.

Meanwhile the lovers were not idle, though, as they laughingly declared, they had nothing to show. Intensely pleasant were the walks and drives they together had, and delicious the talks. And they in their turn had plans for their own future to make, and longings for a useful life in their own home to be.

For it was a resting-time. And a happy time it was, and Clyne desired nothing so much

as that this pleasant season should last, and that all might continue as it was. For Clyne needed help; his years of exile having made him forgetful of much that it was absolutely necessary he now should know. Not less did he need and crave for the sympathy and care of those who loved him; for even Blanche's easy-mindedness could not close her eyes to the fact that, in his weather-beaten face and still attenuated form, there were severe traces of the long period of painful exile and exposure to savage life which it had been his lot to endure. And she and Constance, in their gentle hearts, resolved to devote themselves to the careful tending of their long-lost and much-loved brother. And Edulf! how deeply did he share in all this anxiety and care for Clyne! How interested was he in all his friend's plans and projects, and how able, too, wisely to counsel him in them all; while his own great happiness in the society of Constance, made the days sweep past all unconsciously in their rapid flight. Edulf, however, had other claims which his kind heart could not resist. Mrs. Waldegrave was depressed and

ill. The blighting of *her* hopes in the sad accident which had robbed her Aimée of her dashing beauty and vigour, had told terribly upon her spirits and health, and her husband wrote entreatingly to Edulf that he would no longer delay setting out for Thornfield.

The story of Aimée had been told to him by Constance, all mention of any care or influence of hers being omitted in her narrative; while the heart-consoling fact of the great and glorious change which had passed over her soul, served to lift Edulf's heart in grateful praise.

And so he tore himself away, to return ere long, he hoped, to Hilstone and to Constance.





CHAPTER XV.

THE NEW-YEAR.

'The night-shades have begun their flight,
The mists are passing into light,
The morning-star is on the height.

Jubilate.'

DR. BONAR.

THE year was by this time far advanced, and the social season of Christmas was again drawing near. Any little mental puzzle as to how it could be spent in a family gathering of those now so dear to each other, was solved by the arrival of an invitation from Miss Mackillop to her nephew and nieces at Hilstone to spend Christmas with her. She was lonely without her girls, she wrote, and she longed to see her exiled nephew on his auspicious and safe return home; and if he could put up with her small cottage accommodation, nothing would please her more than to receive

him under her roof. Cyne, whose affectionate nature clung to his kind and good-natured smiling face and gentle ways were among the pleasantest reminiscences of bygone days — was deeply desired, besides, to thank her for the good she had afforded those so long as she could spare of need,—at once and gratefully accepted the invitation. The Valenciennes came, with Aimée; and, of course, Madame de Senne will be there and Madame de Senne will look at Constance whose name she has never gone from her and ever to her heart. She is of her affectionate and good-natured heart that just be proud and happy again to see her in her own home. She is a good-natured and handsome lady and a good-natured lady and all these things were not to be made in vain and she is a good-natured lady who Cyne loves. She is a good-natured lady who remembers that she is a good-natured lady and says he would like to see her and she will told me she would like to see her and she will to stay at home and see her and she will

'And what did you say?' asked Constance, looking up at the eager girl.

'Oh, I just said it was no business of mine where he went.'

'And did you feel that?' said Constance, who had watched with solicitude the very ardent and growing attachment of young Bryce for her impetuous little sister.

'Oh, well! I wasn't going to tell him what I felt. And I'm so glad now I didn't; for I want to stay with my own darling Clyne, and, as the story-books say, "live happily with him all my days."'

Constance talked quite seriously on the matter of Kenneth Bryce to Blanche, but at nothing more of the real state of her feelings could she arrive than the rather dubious concession, that, 'next to Clyne and Edulf, she certainly thought Kenneth nearly the nicest fellow she knew.' Constance forbore to dwell upon the subject, when, as she believed—and her conviction was right—Blanche scarcely knew what her real feelings were. They would see more of each other soon, and Constance knew she should have all

Blanche's confidence on this subject, as she had ever had on every subject in her brief young life. All considerate arrangements were made for the quiet but hospitable entertainment of the Hilstone poor at this Christmas season, and for the comfort of the household domestics left behind; and on a clear, crisp day in December, Clyne and his sisters bade a short farewell to their now happy home.

'What antiquarian curiosity is that?' said Clyne, as, the train having steamed into the Edinburgh station the following afternoon, his eye fell on a quite singular-looking female, whose eager, penetrating glance scanned each carriage as it arrived.

He was answered by Blanche springing out upon the platform, and, perfectly regardless of time and place, flinging her arms round the queer individual's neck, while she eagerly exclaimed:

'You angel, Nelly! you perfect angel! How beautiful and nice you look!'

Clyne thought his little sister had, in the wild exuberance of her joy, taken leave of her

senses altogether, and was preparing in as polite a manner as possible to back out of the introduction which he saw looming upon himself, when Blanche, dragging Nelly by her red tartan shawl straight up to Clyne, said :

‘Clyne, allow me to introduce to you Nelly—the lealest, best of women.’

Constance, who meanwhile had been met by Edulf, and who was for the moment lost in the present joy of such a meeting, now hastened to her brother’s relief, and, by her quiet greeting of the worthy woman, composed her excited spirits, and ended what was fast assuming the aspect of a ‘scene.’

Nelly, in a short stuff gown, with the identical shawl, white stockings, and shoes worn on a previous occasion, when she was first introduced to our readers, and with a bonnet which for size and oddity of shape baffles all description, now busied herself in hunting up the luggage, and answering the very miscellaneous questions which Blanche contrived to dart in upon her.

‘How is auntie? and are the apples all pulled? and, Nelly, is there a fire in our room? Oh, it

is so cold! And are the Bryces home? and—and oh! I've so much to ask and hear about.'

'Eh, Miss Blanche, but he *is* a grand gentleman, is Maister Clynde. An' he's no a bit the waur o' his sair, lang time amang thae dreadful savages—no ae grain! He's unco grave an' foreign-like atweel; but he's seen a hantel, an' kens a hantel mair; an' he that wad eat the fruit maun clim' the tree. But *I'm* thinkin' he'll look noo afore he loup, an' he'll ken the better whaur to licht.'

Blanche laughed merrily.

'Hech! it does my auld ears guid to hear ye lauch ag'in, Miss Blanche. We've been unco douce sin' ye hae been awa', an' Miss Constance an' a'. But the langest lane has its turn, an' ye're welcome back to Hope Hill. Muckle we likit ye; but we best ken the worth o' a thing when we want it.'

For Nelly had a fixed idea in her head that some sort of small speech was quite indispensable as an expression of welcome; and in the case of the 'young leddies' her words were far short

indeed of the warm feelings which glowed in her kind heart towards them. Miss Mackillop had endeavoured vainly to prevent Nelly setting forth on the quite unnecessary expedition of meeting the travellers; and while her simple word was ever law to the worthy woman, she felt unwilling to damp the ardour and disappoint the hopes so fondly cherished by Nelly, of being 'Maister Clynde's first-fit in Edinburgh,' and of welcoming the return of the dearly loved young ladies. She trusted, therefore, to the good sense and feeling of her relatives, to appreciate the well-meant apparition of Nelly in her Sunday suit at the Edinburgh station.

Miss Mackillop's unaffected cordiality won Clyne's heart at once; and Edulf, who of course accompanied the party to the cottage, received his full share of her loving interest and attention.

What happy days there were at the dear cottage now! And how Edulf's heart thrilled as he listened to the account which Miss Mackillop from time to time gave him of Constance, and her sweet life of sacred self-denial!

And Aimée! She could seldom, so great

was her emotion as she thought over these past events, give him any continuous narrative of the part which Constance had had in her life's history. But that she owed everything to *her*, under God, in the great saving change which had passed upon her soul, as well as in the saving of her life, he soon came to learn. And as he watched the once exacting, self-willed girl patiently, and often toilsomely enough, striving to fulfil her part among the many who claimed her care, and witnessed the sunny cheerfulness which amid mistakes and difficulties she ever sought to preserve, he adored the power of Him who alone can lift a soul out of its deep darkness and sin, and introduce it into the marvellous light of His own kingdom of grace.

Keenly as Aimée felt the trial which debarred her from many of the pursuits she had so dearly loved, and which, too, had so sadly changed the style of her wild, dashing beauty, she was thankful for her spared life.

'I can serve God although I am lame, Uncle Edulf,' she said one day as he sat beside her.

‘My head and hands can work, though my poor limbs can no longer run and walk.’

‘And, Aimée, your heart is in its right place,’ said Edulf very tenderly. ‘When that is right, it will keep all other members of our being right. Rather, Christ will keep it; and His presence, ruling, reigning there, will shed light and love throughout all our lives.’

‘I *know* now what I ought to be, and live for; and although, Uncle Edulf, I make so many mistakes, and do things so badly compared with what I wish, somehow my worries and troubles seem only now like fitting shadows on a sunny day.’

‘And from these imperfections and mistakes, of which you speak, and over which you lament, Aimée, you will get away by degrees. They will drop from you as you travel on and keep looking upwards.’

‘Yes, Uncle Edulf, I feel that indeed. And sometimes as my spirits flag, when I think of all my change, and I get afraid lest I shall become impatient and weary, I count over all my mercies; and oh! they far, far exceed my trials.

And, Uncle Edulf, I now can say that the love of Christ constraineth me to seek and strive to live not for *myself*, but for Him who loved me and gave Himself for me. Better to enter into life halt or maimed, than, having two eyes or feet, to be cast into hell-fire.'

'Aimée, how glad your words make me!'

'I am quite conscious of a great power and help coming to me through all my endeavours to live a life of obedience to God. And I am happy now, Uncle Edulf,—far, far happier than in the days of my pride and selfishness. The great craving is filled, and each new morning I have such bright, fresh hopes stirring my spirit, that I am often lost in wonder at the change.'

'A thankful heart,' said Edulf, 'makes a joyful one.'

We shall take but one more peep at Aimée before we close. It is New-Year's day. The house is full; for the boys are home for their holidays, and Aunt Bridget of course has come. Mr. and Mrs. Waldegrave are there, and Uncle

Edulf too. The children are joyous and free. It is *home* again; for that fair creature who moves among them all, is full of interest and desire to be their mother indeed. Mrs. Waldegrave, whose indulgent, gentle ways have drawn the hearts of the young people towards her, does much, in her unconscious way, to endear the tie between Aimée and them, while the Squire's off-hand frankness and love of sports make him an immense favourite with the boys. Captain Ellicombe, however, has a fascination for them, all his own. His wonderful sea adventures, his stories of the savages and their hunting and habits, and his brilliant descriptions of the foreign places he has visited, thrill the hearts of his young auditors, who hang upon his lips entranced. Absorbed though he is with his own interests, he never seems too busy to gratify them; and on this New-Year's day he has spent the whole afternoon with them on Duddingston Loch,

The day was clear and bright, and high hopes were in many hearts as they welcomed the new-born year, and looked into its clear, young face,

as if to read reflected there the events which lay cradled in its breast. And in no heart on this New-Year's day was hope more high than in Aimée's, as anew she cast herself upon her Saviour's love, and commemorated the day by taking a fresh start in the divine life.

The thought that by her sin she had wounded so glorious a Saviour, clouded her spirit; the belief that He had cleansed her soul, and was now waiting to help and guide her in every step of her difficult path, shed a rainbow halo over her spirit. The old year had been gloomy and dark, but the day-star now shone in her heart, ushering in a new year and a new life of nobler aspirations and desires. The language of her heart was in these loving words:

'Where Thou dwellest, Lord,
No other thought should be,
Once duly welcomed and ador'd,
How could I part with Thee?
Bethlehem must lose Thee soon, but Thou wilt grace
The single heart to be Thy sure abiding-place.'

In the evening the family party was increased by the presence at dinner of Mr. and Mrs. Dundas and Flora and Jeanie, and the entire little party

from Hope Hill. It was a lively, happy scene, and one which lived in the memories of those who took part in it, after many days. All the young Drummonds were present at dinner, with the exception of Harry and Kitty, who formed the 'Scotch dessert,' and were ushered into the dining-room at that stage of the proceedings. Little Kitty, in her pretty white frock and blue ribbons, hastened to Aimée, who lifted her into her own little chair beside herself; while Harry, having stood for a moment beside his papa, squeezed in at Aimée's other side. The restful, happy look the children wore towards her, and the freedom of their prattling, playful ways, told how she now was trusted and loved.

In the drawing-room all was brightness and life; and never did Charles Drummond feel a happier, prouder man than as he entered the cheerful room and his eye rested on the various groups. Mrs. Waldegrave and Mrs. Dundas were nodding their heads together in earnest talk on the ottoman, while Constance and Flora were in eager conversation. Blanche and

Margaret were turning over the pages of a beautifully illustrated copy of Goethe's works, Margaret's sage remarks being often ludicrously interrupted by some wild, imaginative sally of Blanche, too amusing for even Margaret's intellectual gravity to withstand.

On the sofa reclined Aimée, while Miss Mackillop sat beside her. Kitty nestled on Aimée's lap, and Elsie clung lovingly round her; while Bruce kept hovering near, ready with his help should Aimée rise, and ever loving to be anticipating all her wants. As the gentlemen entered the room, a diversion in the groups took place. A radiant smile lighted up Aimée's face as her husband approached her, and a look of such peace and happiness greeted him as never in the days gone by he had seen before. Presently music was called for, and was responded to by the delicious pianoforte performance of Flora, and the sweet singing of Constance. Edulf's rich tones mingled with theirs in several fine duets, while Mr. Drummond rejoiced to form a bass to some favourite Scottish melodies.

'Franev,' said Edulf, coming up to his sister

and looking towards Aimée, 'she is fulfilling now all the meaning of her name.'

Tears glistened in Mrs. Waldegrave's eyes as she gazed fondly on her child. 'Oh, Edulf!' she replied; 'but it has been through a terrible sea of trouble.'

'Yes; but the end is reached. And how happy she looks! She now realizes in her heart and in her life, that "not he that commendeth himself is approved, but whom the Lord commendeth."'

The evening closed with prayer and praise to the God of the families of all the earth,—to Him by whose good hand upon them all, those now present were gathered so happily together; whose presence in the hearts of not a few of them, was the crowning joy of those hearts; and whose presence in the home, too, was the pledge of peace and love.

Our story is nearly done. In the summer, early in the 'leafy month of June,' Edulf and Constance were married. The wedding was

quiet, for the year of mourning for her father was not yet ended. But there was lacking nothing to evince the love entertained for her, in and around her home. Touching tributes were paid by the tenantry of the esteem in which she was held, by sundry presentations in the shape of wedding-gifts; while the cottagers, among whom her name was a household word, mourned her departure as the loss of their best earthly friend.

She looked pure and lovely in her bridal dress, and if, while

‘The smile was on her cheek,
The tear was in her e’e,’

it was the tear welling up from a heart full of gratitude and joy. Blanche and Flora Dundas were her bridesmaids, and Vincent Durant was Edulf’s right-hand man. Mrs. Waldegrave was a charming matron on the occasion, and Miss Mackillop was quite invaluable. Mr. Drummond and Aimée were excused, as Aimée shrank from mingling in so large a party, and the young couple were pledged to pay a long visit to Glengask ere the season closed.

Clyne made a splendid host ; and the occasion was one for the display of Hilstone to the greatest advantage.

Report whispers that Vincent Durant and Merry Carew are engaged, and that Mrs. Waldegrave is nearly as happy in the prospect of their marriage as if it had been the fulfilment of her own pet scheme for Aimée. For Merry is a special favourite of hers, no less than Vincent ; and the hope of having her thus permanently settled near Thornfield is most pleasant. The same busy-tongued rumour asserts that Flora Dundas is to be the future Lady of Hilstone, in which case the incorrigible Blanche may possibly be induced to look with more favour on Kenneth Bryce, whom meanwhile she contrives to keep in a chronic condition of suspense and hope.

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